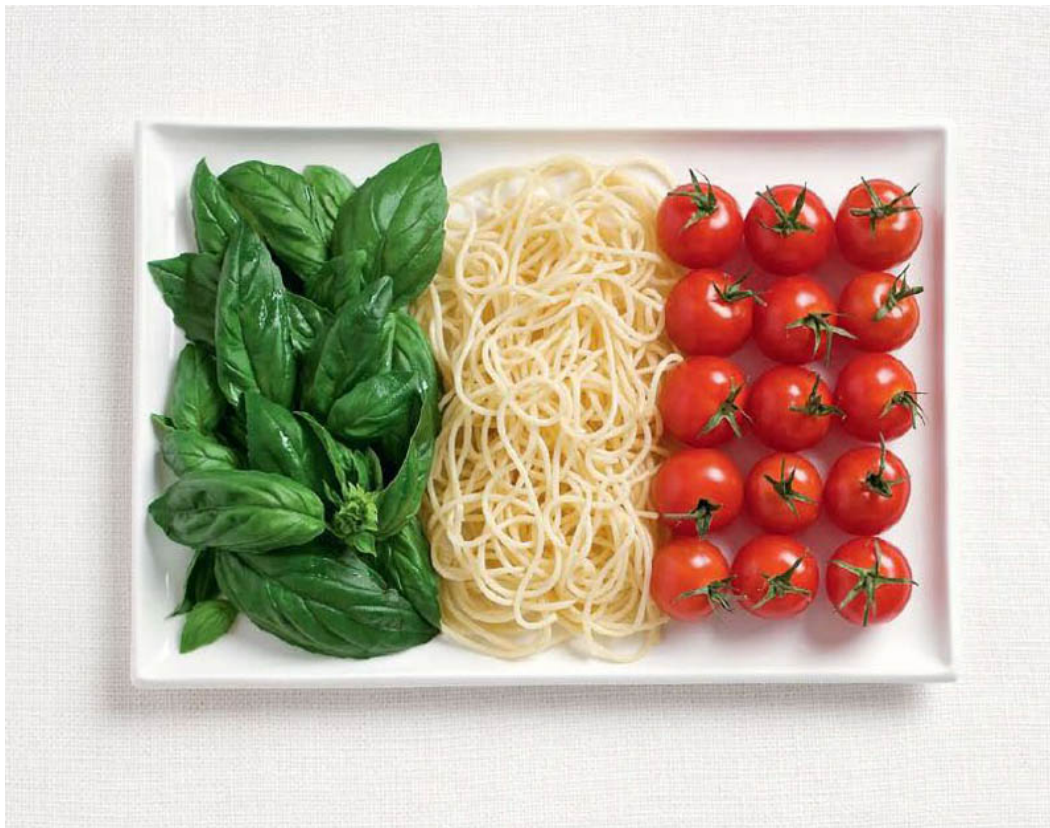


Università degli Studi di Milano
Dipartimento di Scienze della Mediazione Linguistica e di Studi Interculturali
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Laboratorio (3 CFU)

Storia, cultura, significati del cibo

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Lezione 6 (26/3/2015) “L’invenzione della tradizione: i prodotti tipici di fronte all’industria”
Relatore: Prof. Stefano Magagnoli, Docente di Storia Economica, Università degli Studi di Parma

DISPENSA A CURA DELL’ASSOCIAZIONE LAPSUS

ABSTRACT

"L'invenzione della tradizione: i prodotti tipici di fronte all'industria"

(Prof. Stefano Magagnoli, Università degli Studi di Parma):

Esiste davvero una “vera” tipicità nell’era dei prodotti tipici industriali? In che modo essa si trasferisce dalle lavorazioni artigianali a quelle industriali, e in che modo viene rappresentata nel marketing e nella pubblicità? Qual è lo spazio riservato a questi prodotti nelle EXPO che si svolgono durante l’industrializzazione dell’Europa?

Seguendo il filo rosso di queste domande cercheremo di proporre alcune risposte al perché i consumatori sono tanto attratti dai prodotti tipici tanto da essere in molti casi disponibili a pagare un prezzo elevato per averli. Attraverso quali richiami essi condizionano il nostro desiderio di consumarli? In questo caso ci soffermeremo sul concetto di “mito della memoria” e di prodotto tipico in grado di soddisfare il nostro desiderio di distinzione.

L’ultima parte della lezione sarà dedicata all’analisi dei filmati di Carosello, uno dei più efficaci strumenti di “educazione al consumo” nella storia dell’economia italiana. Negli anni del boom economico, infatti, l’industria alimentare nostrana ha la necessità di educare i consumatori all’acquisto di cibi industriali. Quali sono le argomentazioni utilizzate per vendere i nuovi prodotti? Come si scompone-ricompone il rapporto tra tradizione e modernità?

NOTA SULLA DISPENSA

In questa, come nelle altre dispense di Lapsus, troverete materiali di vario genere (dagli estratti di saggi, agli articoli di taglio scientifico a quelli di destinazione divulgativa, alle infografiche, alle schede di approfondimento) con lo scopo di mettere in relazione fonti e linguaggi comunicativi differenti tra loro. L’obiettivo che speriamo di raggiungere con questa scelta è fornire agli studenti un panorama ampio di suggestioni per stimolare l’approfondimento autonomo delle tematiche trattate, nonché lo spirito critico nell’intrecciare diversi punti di vista.

Typicality in History

Tracing a Basic Definition

Giovanni CECCARELLI, Alberto GRANDI,
Stefano MAGAGNOLI

Università di Parma – Food Lab, Dipartimento di Economia

Food history is a fully recognized field of research in academic communities around the world. Degree courses and postgraduates have focused on cultural, social and anthropological aspects rather than technical or dietary aspects of food. And academic associations now exist to investigate food history and culture; these include ICREFH (International Commission for Research into European Food History), set up in 1989, and IEHCA (Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation), founded in 2002 and home of the Cultural Food Studies Centre. There are also many new journals such as “Food and History”, that appeared in 2003, and “Food and Foodways” that first appeared as far back as 1985.

Traditionally, food history has been examined within the two main areas of economic and social history; the history of agriculture, and, albeit in a slightly more indirect manner, urban history. Towns were after all home to guilds, which maintained and promoted artisan skills, and moreover towns, at least in Italy, were home to the nobility for whom meals meant pleasure and the opportunity of showing off their wealth. The history of agriculture is obviously more robust as a discipline and has a more established academic tradition and methodology. The roots of typical products in farming traditions and local area appear to be more natural and direct. It may be surprising, then, that although traditions are strong, recent research has found that the links between traditions and foods can be somewhat weaker than they appear.

Academic debate is currently lively and is in rapid evolution. In this context, this volume sets out to report more than the proceedings of a

conference held in Parma in late 2010, where issues related to the history of typical food were discussed.¹ Conference issues are becoming central to economics and cultural and social studies extremely rapidly, so it is useful to update and enlarge the proceedings. The history of the concept of the “typical” nature of food products raises general problems such as “area”, “identity”, innovation” and development. This book brings into the arena of discussion various fields of interest, as well as providing a forum for inter-relation of these issues.

When the idea of a conference on typical products and their history was first mooted by the Parma Food Lab – Laboratorio per la storia dell'alimentazione, it became clear that although publications abounded, there was no theoretical framework into which they could be fitted. There even was dissatisfaction with the indeterminate theoretical ideological framework forming the background for most research. Historical research on typical products, although well documented, tends to be somewhat hagiographic. This is because of two main reasons; first, such studies are often published to celebrate anniversaries or achievements of typical produce associations, perhaps by local authorities. And second, the conventional cultural paradigm is that a typical product by definition is the result of a long-term process of sedimentation and a basically unchanged production process, subject to technological or legislative modification.

It is also important to note that in recent years, typical products have acquired importance in agricultural policy debate, especially within the European Union. Not surprisingly, this debate has strong ideological connotations: typical products have become the standard bearer for an agri-food sector considered to be “healthy” and “good”, in opposition to mass production and levelling of tastes imposed by “evil” multinationals.² Introducing differentiation and subtlety into debate exposes them to the risk of instrumentalization and preconceived concepts. It sometimes appears that enriching the debate is taken to be a form of lese majesty. But the model is unavoidably complicated by empirical evidence; the concept of typicality cannot be studied in isolation from “area”, “tradition”, “identity”, “market”, “consumption” or “local development”. Almost all contributions gathered in this book focus on these elements: together they comprise, if not a structural framework, an organic cultural frame.

¹ *La tipicità nella storia: tradizione, innovazione e territorio*, held in Parma and Langhirano, September 9th-11th, 2010.

² This approach may also emerge in excellent scholarly works, see for example Trubeck, A.B., *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*, Berkeley, California University Press, 2008.

During the Parma conference, awareness arose that, although the papers were based on different disciplines and methodologies, they all led to the search for a coherent, overall definition. Such framework is at the basis of this book, since the contributions clearly define three major fields of investigation: tradition building, the role of institutions and the relationships with the area. From the historical point of view, typicality can thus be considered as the outcome of the three elements of tradition, institutions and territory, which constitute the broad outline for classification of research.

Contributions included in this book examine separate aspects of food history, but they can all be assembled into a single paradigm. The first contribution by Madeleine Ferrières focuses on one of the three macro-themes with an examination of the French term *terroir*, which has a wider meaning than “territory”. As Ferrières observes, historians need to use it with care, particularly where it constitutes the subject of debate, as in the case of typical products. But whether “territory” is considered as economic, social, political or in other ways, it is becoming an increasingly important term for historians.

After having examined the history of the term “terroir”, Ferrières focuses on its relation to food history, suggesting that geographical characterisation of foods not only preceded the birth of gastronomic tradition. In addition, this characterisation appears to have predated a codified use of the word “terroir”. In fact during the *Ancien Régime*, produce tended to be protected on an explicitly geographical basis. This was true for all artisan products (and not only food), and was partly a result of the rise of the guilds in the Middle Ages.³ The picture however varies across Europe. Thus a direct link seems to connect institutional systems of protections and guarantees on territorial and urban basis in medieval times (in, for example, France and Italy) to today’s protected denominations.⁴ In England, however, under a different cultural and economic system, the *commercial revolution* brought about “l’affirmation d’une typicité sans terroir”. Variables in the model of typicality include the rarity and the availability of a product as well as the geography, history and climate of an area. Also important are the

³ Guenzi, A., Massa, P., Piola Caselli, F., (eds.), *Guilds, Markets and Work Regulations in Italy, 16th-19th centuries*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998.

⁴ Capatti, A., Montanari, M., *La cucina italiana: storia di una cultura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1999; Montanari, M., *L’Europa a tavola: storia dell’alimentazione dal Medioevo a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2008; *Gli archivi per la storia dell’alimentazione: atti del convegno, Potenza-Matera, 5-settembre 1988*, Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali-Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1995.

distance and the exotic nature of the place of origin, which may be real or imagined.

This aspect appears to have played a long-term key role in building up the concept of typicality, particularly in the United Kingdom, which, because of its large urban population and early industrialisation constituted the main market for products from all over the world. Maura Franchi shows how a typical product evokes “elsewhere”, places far away in time and/or distance. In a sense a product to be perceived as typical requires a background of legend or myth. This was true in the first half of XIXth century London and Boston and it is still true today in post-industrial supermarkets all over the world. It was true for Madeira wine as the Anglo-American upper classes sipped it and imagined sea-faring adventures,⁵ and it is true today for lardo di Colonnata,⁶ which evokes the hard life of the marble quarriers near Carrara in Tuscany, who consumed lard for its high content in calories and fat. The consumption of a food and consumer satisfaction are always based on an element of identification grounded on a legend or a myth. In fact, the briefest glance at any ancient cookbook, from that of Apicius onwards, shows that ingredients are used for their background in terms of place of origin as much as for their contribution to the taste of the dish.

The legendary or mythical aspect is thus an important part of typicality. It often needs to be *built up*. But this does not entail diminishing the importance of the intrinsic quality; rather, it means placing appreciation within a context of individual and collective cultural references. Taste “is both *premise* and *result* in the construction of a typical food product”, it is “the result of a storytelling”.⁷ This clearly leads to a reconsideration of the history of marketing, and also sheds new light on the use of history made by the marketing industry. Typical products since their appearance have constituted a testing ground for marketing. It is one thing to consume a local product that was also eaten by one’s forbears, or to buy fashionable clothes and shoes that we ourselves do not know how to make or copy. But it is completely different to eat unfamiliar food. We require a great deal of persuasion to eat it. Naturally, we also require a degree of disposable income and an efficient trade structure. But myths and legends always

⁵ Hancock, D., *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

⁶ Galoppini, L., (a cura di), *Il lardo nell’alimentazione toscana dall’antichità ai nostri giorni*, Modena, Aedes Muratoriana, 2003.

⁷ See below Franchi, M., *The Contents of Typical Food Products: Tradition, Myth, Memory. Some Notes on Nostalgia Marketing*.

need to be there to persuade consumers to experiment with new foods and try out new emotions in food.

Marketing, trade structure and disposable income can only appear once there is capital and industrialization; hence, the typical product came about at the time of industrialization. There is a clear paradox in that product success is based on authenticity, naturalness and artisan *savoir-faire*, while at the same time it needs standard industrial production to exist, and trading and distribution channels for its appeal to reach as many consumers as possible. It requires to be a legend, which needs to be strengthened even it is adapted at the same time. The product also often needs to safeguard an inviolable and sacrosanct “purity” in the eyes of consumers. Hence the appearance of *Avatar* products.⁸

There are numerous example of typical products that first appeared as imitations of luxury products. Marsala wine first appeared as an imitation of the most reputed Madeira, Port and Sherry wines. Other typical products gained an international reputation only once they were mass produced; these include the renowned Christmas sweets like the *Panettone di Milano* and the *Pandoro di Verona*. These were originally artisan products, although today they are almost exclusively industrially produced and the original is no longer present even on their earliest market.

The papers by Philippe Meyzie, Anneke Geyzen and Régis Huguenin are all set against this background, describing for different historical periods the construction of gastronomic specialties in the South East of France, the building of the Flemish cuisine and the better known case of Swiss chocolate. The latter is to some extent surprising, as it carries the image of the country as a whole, but this image has very little to do with the reality of the production process. The traditional icons of dairy cows, Swiss chalets, snow-covered peaks and green pastures were no longer part of production from the mid-XXth century onwards. As far back as the early 1900s, the big brands such as Nestlé, Suchard, Tobler, and Lindt had started internationalisation by locating production overseas. It was paradoxical, but only to a certain extent, that marketing strategy strengthened the link with the image of Switzerland just as chocolate manufacturing was almost entirely shifted elsewhere.

The case of Swiss chocolate also provides a link with the second part of the book that focuses on the role of institutions. From at least the 1960s, institutions in Switzerland, both public and private, engaged in

⁸ See below Ceccarelli, G., Grandi, A., Magagnoli, S., *The Avatar: An Economic History Paradigm for Typical Products*.

product certification and protection of national identity, however shaky this was in reality.

On a different continent, Fabio Parasecoli describes the attempts by local institutions in Costa Rica to strengthen local development through Turrialba cheese. In the 1990s this was identified as a potential driver of development by using specialized agriculture in a backward area. In Austria too, cheese became a decisive part of regional identity in the area of Grosses Walsertal, and as described by Norbert Weixlbaumer and Stefan Kah, even affected environmental policy.

Cristina Grasseni makes an even more detailed analysis of strategies used to protect typical products in the Italian Alps, particularly in Lombardy. Safeguarding product quality is unbreakably tied to promoting of the area of production and the cultural identity of its inhabitants. The case of Taleggio shows that if institutions are feeble in defending a typical product, producers can develop a bottom-up strategy of extra protection, creating an even more exclusive cheese (*strachitunt*). This case also provides indirect confirmation of the Avatar paradigm. David Burigana traces a history of European integration through the trade in typical cheeses between Italy and France. This unusual account moves from micro to macro level and provides a fascinating insight into international relations as well as the history of typical products. It shows that the “typical product system” was exploited as a way of bringing about review of Community Agricultural Policy (CAP). The history of food, as this contribution reveals, is thus charged with greater political significance than might superficially appear. Typical products may become a political fiefdom, an exclusive right that needs to be defended at all costs. It is not only marketing that forces the creation of a legend around a typical product, there may be strong political considerations as well. Gloria Sanz Lafuente provides a case study of a single specific product. She describes how multiple scientific and political administrations arrived at a definition of quality standards for cider, a traditional Spanish drink. This was a top-down process that gradually obliged producers to adapt to new or more standardised production systems and models of taste.

The third part of the book links the agri-food dimension of typicality with integrated local promotion, especially tourism. Today wine and gastronomic routes or trails are a large and increasingly important factor in tourism, and the enhancement and exploitation of tradition can be a trump card on this highly competitive market. France and Italy have better exploited this relation to foster local development.

If one traces a two-dimensional map of regions important for tourism and places that give their name to typical products in Italy and France, would find that these areas tend to overlap. Institutional policies that

lead to a product's denomination of origin may cause not only the success of that product, but also attract more tourists in that region. Christian Barrère's contribution explicitly describes the "construction of typicality" by comparing three areas of sparkling wine production in France. Similarly, Simone Kovatz provides a geography of wine, starting from the years after the Unification of Italy in 1861. Focusing on Chianti, Luca Mocarrelli shows how the process leading to denomination of origin of this wine and its production area was far from straightforward, even though Chianti has enjoyed a high profile reputation on international markets since the Middle Age. This aspect is examined in detail by Ezio Ritrovato for the southern Italian region of Puglia, where the development of the wine industry has played a key role in the development of tourism. This link is confirmed by Annunziata Berrino who demonstrates that typicality has become a driving factor in tourism all over Italy in the last thirty years. In the province of Reggio Emilia, production of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and particularly the re-introduction of the traditional breeds of cattle, whose historical back-ground is provided by Marie-Lucie Rossi, is now playing a key role in local development. This part of the book may appear to deal with issues peripheral to those faced by the rest of the contribution. But this is only superficially the case. Study of a typical product as an element of local identity, spurious and tourism-led as it may be, entails focusing on its essential characteristic.

We noted above that in history the definition of typicality has been based on "tradition", "institutions" and "territory". All three of these aspects are however open to modification and change. As Mario Zannoni shows in the last part of this book (in which some empirical experiences are gathered), this can be sometimes the outcome of major technological improvements. But as a number of contributions points out historical rooting can even be completely re-invented.

The mystique of typical products is subject to radical discussion and it would be impossible to ascribe less importance to it. But this would not be fair or honest. In reality, it would be incorrect to ascribe the know-how and labour forming part of each and every typical product solely to a remote and unclear past. These factors are also part and parcel of the attempts and strategies of local institutions and producers to bring their products to consumers in the modern world today.

LA GLOBALIZZAZIONE DEL GUSTO. ESPOSIZIONI UNIVERSALI E PRODOTTI ALIMENTARI

1. *Esposizioni universali e prodotti alimentari*

Il grande successo delle esposizioni universali testimonia che, nel corso dell'Ottocento, il linguaggio della tecnologia, in particolare di quella meccanica, è ormai diventato il principale canone comunicativo del capitalismo che trova una costante rappresentazione nella vetrina dell'Expo.

A cavallo tra Otto e Novecento secolo l'allargamento dei mercati internazionali produce un rilevante sviluppo dell'industria alimentare. Non si tratta di una novità: già nei secoli precedenti, infatti, cibi e vini geograficamente localizzati (mortadelle di Bologna, vini di Bordeaux, formaggi grana di Parma) erano presenti sui mercati europei. Ciò che di inedito si registra tra i due secoli è la possibilità – data dall'organizzazione industriale – di serializzare la produzione dei beni e intercettare così una domanda sempre più estesa, grazie ai minori costi di produzione e trasporto.

Quanto e come contribuiscono le esposizioni universali a diffondere il consumo di questi prodotti? Quali sono le preparazioni alimentari ed enologiche che sostengono le prime fasi della “globalizzazione del gusto”? Qual è – nel caso italiano – la mappa dei prodotti tipici inviati a “esplorare” il mercato del gusto nelle esposizioni universali di fine Ottocento? E qual è il loro livello generale in rapporto a paesi che, come la Francia, hanno già una solida reputazione in tema di prodotti del *terroir*?

Questa relazione analizza il fenomeno evidenziando, con particolare attenzione al caso italiano, come il passaggio da produzione artigianale a industriale renda necessaria la radicale innovazione dei prodotti alimentari tipici, per rendere possibile l'aumento dei volumi produttivi e soddisfare così il progressivo aumento della domanda, superando i vincoli che nell'Ancien Régime avevano irrigidito le capacità di reazione degli operatori alle trasformazioni¹. Vincoli che coincidono con l'arretratezza delle tecniche di lavorazione, ma anche con la natura dei beni sottoposti al giudizio degli esperti, che mostrano i ritardi della cultura gastronomica italiana, ancora polarizzata tra

¹ S. ONGER, *Verso la modernità. I bresciani e le esposizioni universali 1800-1915*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2010, p. 11.

la cucina contadina e quella dei ceti urbani, e non ancora interessata dalla “nazionalizzazione” che sarebbe iniziata con la pubblicazione, nel 1891, di *La Scienza in cucina e l'Arte di mangiar bene* di Pellegrino Artusi².

2. *La fine del “mondo ordinato”: l'industria di fronte ai prodotti tipici*

L'identificazione tra prodotto e territorio d'origine è una peculiarità della cultura alimentare italiana sin dal Basso Medioevo³. L'approvvigionamento annonario dei centri urbani e lo sviluppo dei mercati alimentari rafforzano tale legame facendo della provenienza una garanzia di autenticità e qualità, tanto per i prodotti coltivati⁴ quanto per quelli sottoposti alla trasformazione umana, mostrando la profondità storica dell'identificazione tra “luogo” e “prodotto”.

Tecniche di trasformazione sofisticate e capacità di affermare gusto e qualità, permettono così di conquistare un elevato livello di reputazione, che si lega a un dato territorio, esponendo però tali prodotti al rischio di contraffazione e obbligando le istituzioni a introdurre strumenti di protezione⁵.

Un cambiamento nella natura del legame tra cibo e territorio si registra nel XVIII secolo, conseguenza della “rivoluzione industriale” che, ampliando gli scambi, permette scelte di consumo più sfaccettate e influenzate dalle mode del momento⁶. Alcuni prodotti alimentari, identificati dal loro luogo di produzione, assumono così agli occhi dei consumatori la funzione di veri e propri *marker* sociali⁷. Più in generale, le suggestioni della provenienza geografica (vera o artificiosa che sia) diventano un elemento che viene utilizzato per rendere appetibili i prodotti ai consumatori⁸.

Se prima della Rivoluzione industriale questa strategia di marketing è prerogativa di importatori e dettaglianti, con lo sviluppo della moderna industria agro-alimentare e la

² A. CAPATTI, M. MONTANARI, *La cucina italiana. Storia di una cultura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1999, pp. 33-37.

³ M. MONTANARI, *Cultura dell'alimentazione*, in (a cura di) F. Cengarle, *L'Italia alla fine del Medioevo: i caratteri originali nel quadro europeo*, vol. 2, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2006, pp. 269-282.

⁴ M. FERRIERES, *Terroir: jalons pour l'histoire d'un mot*, in (eds./dir.) G. Ceccarelli, A. Grandi, S. Magagnoli, *Typicality in History. Tradition, Innovation, and Terroir / La typicité dans l'histoire. Tradition, innovation et terroir*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 23-43.

⁵ *Fraude, contrefaçon et contrebande de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, (eds.) G. Béaur, H. Bonin, C. Lemerrier, Genève, Droz, 2006.

⁶ J. DE VRIES, *The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution*, in «The Journal of Economic History», LIV, 1994, n. 2, pp. 249-270; A. SMART MARTIN, *Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework*, in «Winterthur Portfolio», 28, 1993, pp. 141-157.

⁷ D. HANCOCK, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 133 ss.; A.B. TRUBEK, *The Taste of Place. A Cultural Journey into Terroir*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, p. 93.

⁸ N.C. COX, K. DANNEHL, *Perceptions of retailing in modern England*, Ashgate 2007.

“prima globalizzazione” dei mercati⁹ anche i produttori vi fanno ricorso. Nel passaggio da produzione artigianale a industriale s’intensificano infatti i fenomeni di “invenzione della tradizione”¹⁰, processo con cui prodotti privi di uno specifico radicamento geografico assumono la “patente” di prodotti della tradizione di un territorio, permettendo così la realizzazione di “tipici industriali” capaci di conquistare il favore dei consumatori grazie a una mirata comunicazione commerciale¹¹; analogamente alcune preparazioni gastronomiche sono – sulla base di un racconto verosimile o sulle tradizioni “esportate” dagli emigranti – incorporate nelle tradizioni culinarie di un determinato luogo¹².

Più in particolare, si può osservare che a cavallo tra l’ultimo ventennio dell’Ottocento e la Prima guerra mondiale l’industria agro-alimentare italiana conosce una fase di significativa espansione, grazie agli effetti della *Retailing Revolution*. La metamorfosi della filiera produttiva introduce numerose innovazioni: dal modo con cui i consumatori si pongono di fronte ai prodotti alimentari alle strategie comunicative delle imprese, costrette a elaborare nuovi paradigmi di comunicazione, in particolare per quei prodotti che nella “tipicità” hanno il proprio punto di forza, e che dallo stretto rapporto con un territorio (col quale condividono storia, tradizione, simboli) traggono gli elementi della propria “reputazione”¹³ e, dunque, della propria competitività.

L’industrializzazione dei prodotti alimentari “tipici” determina infatti il rischio rilevante dell’*anonimato*, che disperderebbe l’insieme di valori immateriali e simbolici intorno cui si definisce la loro identità; pericolo causato da più fattori in concorso tra loro: (a) la produzione seriale, che permette di superare il vincolo della scarsità, ma che appiattisce i legami territoriali; (b) il nuovo modello distributivo, che obbliga a confezionare il prodotto, nascondendolo agli occhi del consumatore; (c) l’affermazione della marca: nel tempo produce valore, ma inizialmente riduce il “vantaggio competitivo” dei legami territoriali del prodotto.

L’industria agro-alimentare fa fronte a queste situazioni con numerosi strumenti: con la costante innovazione del *packaging*; con il ricorso alla comunicazione pubblicitaria; con la costruzione di un *canone narrativo* fondato sui valori della tradizione (che

⁹ M.D. BORDO, A.M. TAYLOR, J.G. WILLIAMSON (eds.), *Globalization in Historical Perspective*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

¹⁰ E.J. HOBSBAWM, T. RANGER (a cura di), *L’invenzione della tradizione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987 (ed. orig. *The invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1984).

¹¹ S. MAGAGNOLI, *L’invenzione “industriale” della tradizione: il cartello dell’Aceto balsamico tradizionale di Modena*, in «Food and History», 2005, 1, pp. 225-263.

¹² C. FISCHLER, *La “macdonaldizzazione” dei costumi*, in (a cura di) J.L. Flandrin e M. Montanari, *Storia dell’alimentazione*, cit., pp. 679-695; V.E. DUCROT, *Los sabores de la Patria. Las intrigas de la historia argentina contadas desde la mesa y la cocina*, Buenos Aires, Grupo Editorial Norma, 2009.

¹³ S. MAGAGNOLI, *Reputazione, skill, territorio*, in «Storia Economica», 2, 2011, pp. 247-274; ID., *Est-ce la ville qui construit les produits typiques? Réputation et terroir à partir d’une perspective italienne*, relazione presentata al Convegno Internazionale *Ville et valorisation des produits des terroirs. Sources, méthodes et approches comparatives à l’échelle internationale*, Université de Bordeaux 3, 21-22 novembre, 2013.

permeano il prodotto) e sul richiamo a una “storia lunga” (che genera il prodotto), ancorata a un territorio specifico.

Le esposizioni universali rappresentano un momento tipico per le imprese italiane, che possono presentare al pubblico internazionale i propri prodotti agricoli e industriali. Paste, vini, salumi, che portano nei padiglioni delle Expo il fascino di un “made in Italy” celebrato in passato nei diari del Grand Tours¹⁴, ma che alla fine dell'Ottocento deve sfidare la concorrenza dell'industria agro-alimentare e vitivinicola estera, più solida e capace di proporre ai mercati prodotti di qualità elevata.

In questo passaggio vi è un'evidente criticità. Per definizione, i “prodotti tipici” sono realizzabili in quantità scarse e a costi elevati. Due condizioni compatibili con una domanda locale, ma che precludono la possibilità di un suo significativo ampliamento sui mercati esteri, tanto più considerata la scarsa standardizzazione dei prodotti, frutto di tecniche produttive arcaiche. Quest'insieme di difficoltà viene affrontato dall'industria agro-alimentare sia con l'elaborazione di nuovi canoni comunicativi, ma soprattutto con la rielaborazione industriale dei prodotti tipici, portando alla creazione di veri e propri Avatar¹⁵, che dei prodotti originali “copiano” le caratteristiche sensibili “reinventando”, tuttavia, il loro gusto e le modalità produttive.

3. Nella vetrina dell'Expo: prodotti tipici e Avatar

Parigi, lunedì 1° aprile 1867 e mercoledì 1° maggio 1878. Due date simbolo per la capitale francese, che sulla spianata dei Champ de Mars vedono l'inaugurazione di due Esposizioni Universali. La presenza italiana è modesta in tutte le esposizioni ottocentesche, a testimonianza di una struttura industriale ancora gracile¹⁶. Il settore agro-alimentare rimarrà a lungo polverizzato in imprese di piccole dimensioni, poco specializzate e presenti nei mercati prevalentemente locali. Lo scarso dinamismo della domanda interna e la deperibilità dei prodotti si abbinano all'arretratezza tecnologica e organizzativa, che impediscono la standardizzazione dei prodotti¹⁷.

Nello specchio delle due Expo parigine – primo carotaggio di una ricerca cronologicamente più ampia – le produzioni alimentari italiane confermano questo stato di

¹⁴ A. BRILLI, *Il viaggio in Italia. Storia di una grande tradizione culturale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

¹⁵ A. GRANDI, S. MAGAGNOLI, *Contrefaçon ou démocratisation du luxe? Les Avatars du Vinaigre Balsamique de Modène*, in (dir.) N. Sougy, *Luxes et internationalisation (XVI^e-XIX^e siècles)*, Neuchâtel, Editions Alphil-Presses Universitaires Suisses, 2013, pp. 231-247; G. CECCARELLI, A. GRANDI, S. MAGAGNOLI, *The Avatar: An Economic History Paradigm for Typical Products*, in (eds./dir.) G. Ceccarelli, A. Grandi, S. Magagnoli, *Typicality in History*, cit., pp. 69-86.

¹⁶ A. PELLEGRINO, *L'Italia alle esposizioni universali del XIX secolo: identità nazionale e strategie comunicative*, in «Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea», 2, 2014, pp. 1-20.

¹⁷ Un quadro d'insieme di queste arretratezze in F. CHIAPPARINO, *Tra polverizzazione e concentrazione. L'industria alimentare dall'Unità al periodo tra le due guerre*, in *Storia d'Italia, Annali*, 13, *L'alimentazione*, (a cura di) A. Capatti, A. De Bernardi, A. Varni, Torino, Einaudi, 1998, pp. 205-268.

cose, sospese in una contraddizione ontologica: da un lato, l'inerzia della grande reputazione della cucina italiana rinascimentale; dall'altra, l'incapacità del sistema agro-industriale di essere presente sui mercati internazionali con prodotti di qualità. Gli stessi osservatori coevi stigmatizzano tali criticità, auspicando che il "nuovo corso" politico dell'Italia unita incentivi il miglioramento qualitativo dei prodotti¹⁸: dalle paste alimentari ai latticini, dalle carni insaccate ai vini¹⁹. Uno "stato dell'arte" insoddisfacente, che fa il paio con quello dell'industria in generale²⁰.

Le critiche non si limitano ai prodotti presentati. Sotto accusa anche la "Trattoria Italiana" dell'Expo del 1867, che attira la disapprovazione degli osservatori. Menu dai piatti italiani ma dal gusto mediocre, mal cucinati, distanti anni luce dal sapore delle preparazioni cui si richiamano, quasi a indicare una precoce globalizzazione della cucina nazionale. In una fase di accesi sentimenti nazionalistici e ricerca dell'identità nazionale, tutto ciò appare come un "tradimento" della patria.

Queste critiche suggeriscono anche altre conclusioni, tra cui l'incapacità di allestire un servizio di catering di qualità elevata lontani dai mercati di origine delle materie prime. La necessità, poi, di servire numeri molto elevati di porzioni incide negativamente sul gusto dei cibi, che risulta standardizzato e di modesto livello. Non escludendo a priori, peraltro, che le caratteristiche gustative dei piatti italiani serviti siano volutamente attenuate e levigate proprio in considerazione della platea così variegata dei consumatori dell'Expo. Una scelta, dunque, nella direzione di un'omogeneizzazione del gusto, con la creazione di Avatar dai sapori etnicamente meno connotati. Un destino che, in seguito, sarebbe stato comune a tutte le cucine nazionali "esportate", con la creazione di una vasta gamma di *mélange* gastronomici.

In realtà, l'esperienza della "Trattoria Italiana" del 1867 – in funzione per 217 giorni e con oltre 9 milioni di visitatori – rappresenta un veicolo straordinario per rappresentare il gusto della tradizione culinaria italiana. Tutti i casi di *Italian Sounding* mostrano infatti che per il consumatore non è tanto importante il gusto dei cibi in sé e per sé, quanto la possibilità di soddisfare un proprio bisogno culturale (mangiare all'italiana) ed eventualmente condividerlo con i propri ospiti²¹, affermando così la propria "distinzione" sociale²².

E di *Italian Sounding*, alle Esposizioni di Parigi, si trovano molte tracce. Come nel caso delle paste alimentari – *les pâtes d'Italie* – prodotte ormai in gran quantità dall'industria francese, che grazie agli elevati livelli tecnologici ha conquistato

¹⁸ *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867. Rassegna critica descrittiva illustrata*, Le Monnier, 1868, p. 217 (relazione di G. Bastianello).

¹⁹ *Delle sostanze alimentari alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi. Relazione di Augusto de' Gori, Vice-Presidente del Gruppo VII*, Firenze, Tipografia di G. Barbera, 1868.

²⁰ G. DE LUCA, *L'Italia nell'Esposizione Universale del 1867 in Parigi*, Napoli, Tipografia dei Fratelli Testa, 1869, p. 66.

²¹ S. MAGAGNOLI, *Made in Eataty: identità e falsificazione*, in (a cura di) C.M. Belfanti, *Contraffazione e cambiamento economico. Marche, imprese, consumatori*, Milano, Egea, 2013, pp. 71-97.

²² P. BOURDIEU, *La distinzione. Una critica sociale del gusto*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1983 (ed. orig. *La distinction. Critique sociale du Jugement*, Paris, Les éditions de minuit, 1979).

importanti quote di mercato, riducendo le opportunità di esportazione dei produttori italiani. Ovviamente, sono paste realizzate con grani più teneri e quindi più adatte all'interno di zuppe e preparazioni in brodo. La superiorità delle paste italiane per il classico utilizzo nella "pastasciutta" è indiscutibile. Ma in questa fase di rapida e robusta integrazione dei mercati internazionali, le difficoltà del prodotto italiano sono evidenti, specie in presenza dell'incapacità del consumatore estero di cogliere le reali differenze organolettiche e gustative delle diverse tipologie di prodotto. Tanto più che anche la qualità della produzione italiana appare segmentata: accanto alle paste di elevata qualità (rappresentate a Parigi da Somma e D'Apuzzo di Gragnano, De Simone di Torre Annunziata, Bianchi di Lucca e Cioppi di Pontedera) vi sono infatti quelle genovesi e liguri²³ che hanno ispirato i produttori francesi²⁴.

Occorre peraltro osservare che in questi anni le paste di Gragnano non hanno ancora raggiunto la reputazione e la diffusione che avrebbero invece conosciuto nei decenni successivi, con la costruzione di una filiera produttiva che farà diventare la tradizione storica, vera o presunta, il proprio principale canone narrativo. In realtà, che le paste alimentari fossero largamente consumate in Campania è un dato di fatto. Ma altrettanto vero è che solo nella parte terminale dell'Ottocento inizia a formarsi il "distretto" della pasta, all'interno di un processo di "reinvenzione della tradizione" basato su un'efficace comunicazione pubblicitaria e sull'utilizzo di farine derivate da nuovi grani, come il Senatore Cappelli, disponibile dal 1915, dopo lunghe sperimentazioni e selezioni genetiche.

Osservando il fenomeno in controluce, si può dunque notare come la tradizione alimentare italiana stia attraversando in questi anni una fase di transizione: da un lato, attendendo di essere "reinventata" dalla nascente industria agro-alimentare; dall'altro, sostituendo progressivamente le materie prime della multiforme tradizione artigianale e contadina con altre più idonee a soddisfare le esigenze della trasformazione industriale.

La presenza italiana a Parigi nel campo della pasticceria appare importante, sebbene le imprese rappresentate siano poco più di laboratori artigianali, tutte o quasi destinate a soccombere di fronte ai futuri marchi industriali. Emblematico il caso del panettone, dolce natalizio già molto conosciuto in Europa, ma ancora prodotto da piccoli laboratori artigianali milanesi. Tra questi, a Parigi spicca Paolo Biffi²⁵ – fondatore nel 1847 della Pasticceria Biffi di Corso Magenta, ancora oggi in attività²⁶ – che proseguirà nel solco dell'artigianalità dei prodotti abbinata alla gestione di un elegante caffè cittadino. I grandi *brand* della futura industria pasticciera avranno tutto l'interesse a che produzioni artigianali come quelle di Biffi continuino a incarnare la

²³ Con le sue 134 fabbriche, la Liguria rappresenta un importante polo di produzione esportando circa 26.000 quintali annui di pasta; *Delle sostanze alimentari alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi*, cit., p. 13.

²⁴ *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Sezione italiana. Catalogo Generale*, Roma, Tipografia Barbera, 1878, p. 240; *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867*, cit., p. 216.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 218.

²⁶ <http://www.biffipasticceria.it> (ultimo accesso: 12 dicembre 2014).

tradizione locale, rappresentando la “vera” tipicità che darà legittimazione simbolica agli Avatar industriali, permettendo loro di conquistare i mercati nazionali ed esteri. Una traiettoria imprenditoriale assai differente da quella seguita dalla Saporì, che nel 1878 presenterà al grande pubblico il *Panforte*²⁷.

Di rilievo appare anche il caso dei biscottini di Novara presentati dalla pasticceria Grassini²⁸, successivamente fusasi con la pasticceria Camporelli (presente ancora oggi sui mercati²⁹). Il “biscottino di Novara” è una preparazione di antiche origini, destinato per lo più, a causa della ricercatezza delle materie prime, ai consumi dei ceti sociali abbienti³⁰. Non diverrà mai un prodotto di massa, ma molti anni dopo avrebbe acquisito il ruolo di “tipico” tradizionale di riferimento dei *Pavesini*, l'Avatar industriale che conquisterà il mercato di massa anche a causa del minor prezzo di vendita.

Le considerazioni più emblematiche riguardano due delle eccellenze gastronomiche italiane, cui la vulgata attribuisce “quarti di tipicità” pressoché senza tempo, quasi la loro storia iniziasse con l'inizio dell'avventura mercantile umana: il prosciutto di Parma e il Parmigiano-Reggiano, indissolubilmente legati ai loro *terroir*. Ebbene, nelle Expo parigine tali equivalenze appaiono sostanzialmente sovvertite, mostrando come il rapporto tra prodotti e luoghi possa modificarsi nel tempo e come la tipicità, in definitiva, non sia altro che una costruzione comunicativa.

La gamma dei prosciutti presentati, infatti, premia per lo più produttori non italiani, a dimostrazione di come l'affinamento della coscia di maiale attraverso salagione e stagionatura, nel passato, fosse una pratica estremamente diffusa e che i primati di reputazione registratisi in seguito fossero ancora tutti da conseguire. Grande visibilità hanno i prosciutti di York e del Devonshire, quelli di Westfalia e Ungheria, insieme agli affumicati di Bayonne. L'Italia, in questi anni, può fronteggiare la concorrenza estera solo con i prosciutti di San Daniele e con quelli – di piccole dimensioni – prodotti tra Modena e Vignola e portati a Parigi dal salumificio Palazzi di Modena.

La notazione sulla dimensione dei prosciutti – quelli inglesi sono di dimensioni mastodontiche rispetto a quelli italiani – riguarda ovviamente la tipologia dei maiali allevati in Italia, ancora di razza autoctona e piccola taglia. Tale particolarità, com'è verificabile nel caso dei prosciutti di Cinta senese o iberici, dà luogo a un gusto estremamente sapido e una maggiore secchezza delle carni.

Il vero punto di svolta per la produzione di prosciutti nazionali avviene qualche anno più tardi, a partire dall'introduzione, iniziata nel 1873, della varietà *Large White*, molto versatile e prolifica, di peso più elevato rispetto alle razze autoctone. Le attuali DOP dei prosciutti di Parma e San Daniele prevedono l'utilizzo di maiali *Large White*,

²⁷ *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Sezione italiana. Catalogo Generale*, cit., p. 240.

²⁸ *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867*, cit., p. 219.

²⁹ <http://www.camporelli1852.it> (ultimo accesso: 12 dicembre 2014).

³⁰ <http://www.burovo.it/biscotto.html> (ultimo accesso: 12 dicembre 2014).

che forniscono cosce di peso e dimensioni rilevanti e che permettono al prosciutto di conservare una maggiore morbidezza gustativa³¹.

Ad apparire evidente è che una delle punte di diamante del “made in Italy”, in questi anni, è ancora del tutto ignota ai consumatori. La sua produzione soddisfa mercati locali o tutt'al più regionali, ma non ha ancora acquisito quelle specificità – di gusto, reputazione e dunque “distinzione” – che gli permetteranno di diventare uno dei prodotti gastronomici più conosciuti a livello internazionale.

Altrettanto emblematica la vicenda del Parmigiano-Reggiano, che in questi anni registra il primato dei produttori lombardi, a conferma della competitività della cascina lombarda³² cui fanno eco le prolungate debolezze del sistema produttivo parmense e reggiano³³. Nella grande vetrina parigina spiccano dunque i formaggi di grana prodotti nelle province di Milano, Pavia, Lodi e Crema (con l'eccezione, nel 1878, di due produttori di Parma³⁴), che in questi anni rappresentano luoghi di produzione d'eccellenza del parmigiano, il cui successo sta proporzionalmente crescendo al diffondersi del consumo di risotti o paste secche condite con sughi di carne o pomodoro, di cui il parmigiano grattugiato diviene un complemento naturale³⁵. Formaggi d'eccellenza, realizzati da imprese che non sono però in grado di reggere l'aumento della concorrenza nei decessi successivi. Piccoli indizi, che riportano la nostra attenzione sullo stato del sistema agroalimentare italiano, ancora in via di maturazione e alla ricerca di legami più chiari col *terroir*, oltre che impegnato ad affinare la standardizzazione della qualità e del gusto.

Problemi analoghi sono riscontrabili nel comparto enologico: l'Italia appare infatti in grave ritardo rispetto ai produttori francesi, i cui vini godono di fama e reputazione indiscusse. Tutto ciò è suffragato tanto dai giudizi dei giurati³⁶, quanto dal posizionamento della cucina francese, punto di riferimento obbligato nei pranzi diplomatici e nei ricevimenti di corte quale strumento di distinzione e ritualità³⁷. La realtà dei fatti – nonostante le medaglie e le menzioni ottenute³⁸ – è che l'intera filiera vitivinicola italiana è tecnologicamente arretrata. Si ignorano le tecniche di vinificazione più

³¹ A. GUENZI, *Il sistema agroindustriale*, in *Storia di Parma*, vol. I, *I caratteri originali*, (a cura di) B. Adorni et al., Parma, MUP, 2008, pp. 473 ss.

³² C. BESANA, *Tra agricoltura e industria. Il settore caseario nella Lombardia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2012.

³³ G. CECCARELLI, A. GRANDI, S. MAGAGNOLI, *The “taste” of typicality*, in «Food and History», 2, 2010, pp. 63-64.

³⁴ *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Relazioni dei giurati italiani. Classe LXXI. Corpi grassi alimentari, latticini, uova*, Roma, Tipografia Eredi Botta, 1880, p. 27.

³⁵ *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867*, cit., p. 250.

³⁶ *Exposition Universelle de 1867 à Paris. Catalogue officiel des exposants récompensés par le Jury International*, Paris, E. Dentu Libraire-Éditeur, 1867.

³⁷ S. MAGAGNOLI, D. ADORNI, *Est-ce que la politique italienne mange à la française?*, relazione presentata al Convegno *Le modèle alimentaire français: diffusion, adaptations, transformations, oppositions à travers le monde (17^e-21^e siècles)*, Tours, IECHA, 3-5 dicembre 2014.

³⁸ *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867*, cit., p. 375; *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Relazioni dei giurati italiani. Classe LXXV. Bevande fermentate*, Roma, Tipografia Eredi Botta, 1879.

avanzate, così come gravi ritardi si segnalano nei procedimenti di conservazione. Insomma, più che alla qualità, i produttori italiani sembrano pensare alla quantità, relegando alcune regioni del paese al rango di produttrici di “vini da taglio”, immessi sul mercato a prezzi ben poco remunerativi³⁹.

Nondimeno, nello specchio dell'Expo troviamo già vini destinati in seguito ad acquisire grande reputazione, come il Prosecco friulano, il Picolit, il Valpolicella, e un discreto repertorio di rossi astigiani. Conquistano visibilità internazionale anche il Lambrusco di Modena, l'Orvieto bianco e l'Est Est Est. Già presenti anche i rossi toscani con i primi Chianti imbottigliati da Ricasoli nel castello di Brolio, il Carmignano e il Rosso di Montepulciano. La discesa verso Sud registra solo alcune etichette: il Capri bianco (insieme al Chianti Brolio, al Barolo, al Gattinara⁴⁰ e all'oggi scomparso Castello di Calatubo d'Alcamo, tra i primi vini italiani a essere serviti nei pranzi ufficiali della Corte Savoia⁴¹), il Lacryma Christi e il Moscato di Siracusa. È una fase importante di crescita per il comparto enologico italiano che, comunque, all'Expo del 1878 può già fregiarsi di una riconosciuta reputazione internazionale nel campo dei vini liquorosi, grazie all'ottima qualità dei Marsala inviati sui mercati esteri⁴².

Non mancano alcune prime punte d'eccellenza, ma i veri problemi riguardano la mancanza di tecniche moderne di vinificazione capaci di standardizzare il prodotto, di aumentarne le quantità, di permetterne la conservazione e il trasporto sui mercati. In una parola: la mancanza di tecnologie enologiche avanzate⁴³. Complessivamente, però, l'enologia italiana appare ancora in larga parte da costruire. O meglio, tutto da costruire appare il rapporto con il *terroir*. Un'operazione certo non facile, che sarà resa possibile dalle favorevoli condizioni climatiche italiane e dalle capacità – tecniche e imprenditoriali – del piccolo gruppo di produttori inclini all'innovazione di trainare lo sviluppo del settore enologico e, più generale, dell'intero settore agroalimentare⁴⁴.

STEFANO MAGAGNOLI
(Università di Parma)

³⁹ S. Kovatz, *The Geography of Quality Wine in United Italy. Areas and Producers*; L. Mocarrelli, *The Long Struggle for the Chianti Denomination. Quality versus Quantity* e E. Ritrovato, *Des vins de coupage aux étiquettes à succès. Typicité et culture œnologique dans le développement territorial des Pouilles (Puglie)*, tutti e tre in (eds./dir.) G. Ceccarelli, A. Grandi, S. Magagnoli, *Typicality in History*, cit., rispettivamente pp. 305-321; 323-340 e 341-358.

⁴⁰ Barolo e Gattinara che fanno parte del plotone di “vini alpini” presentati a Parigi nel 1878; *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Sezione italiana. Catalogo Generale*, cit., p. 276.

⁴¹ S. MAGAGNOLI, D. ADORNI, *Est-ce que la politique italienne mange à la française?*, cit.

⁴² *Esposizione universale del 1878 in Parigi. Sezione italiana. Catalogo Generale*, cit., p. 276.

⁴³ *Ivi*, p. 377.

⁴⁴ *L'Italia alla Esposizione Universale di Parigi nel 1867*, cit., p. 376.

Giovanni Ceccarelli, Alberto Grandi, Stefano Magagnoli

*Food Lab, Dipartimento di Economia, Università degli Studi di
Parma, Italy*

The “Taste” of Typicality

Abstract

This paper analyzes how geographical typicality was used to let consumers experience the taste of food. Origin served to certify foodstuff quality since the 14th century, yet by the end of the 19th century this function seems to be disputed by industrialisation. Early 20th century posters and labels show however another picture with “geography” continuing to be crucial in advertising, and food industries using typicality as a means to convey products’ taste and quality. A significant case-study, that of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, supports this interpretation, showing how origin was, from the 14th century on, at the core of its marketing promotion.

Keywords

*Typicality
Designation of origin
Food industry
Advertising
Marketing
Consortium
Parmigiano-Reggiano
Terroir
Local development
Local institutions*

1. Introduction

This article aims to verify how references to “typicality” (either real, presumed or invented) have, since the Late Middle Ages, fostered the reputation acquired on the market by certain food products and how, after the Industrial Revolution, such references were used by food industries as a promotional tool to boost mass consumption by prompting consumers to “taste” food products invested with the title (at times imaginary) of being typical of some place.¹

¹ This contribution is the result of a collective and methodologically unified research path carried out by the authors. In particular, however, Giovanni Ceccarelli wrote the first section (*The “Construction” of Typicality*); Alberto Grandi the second (*From Designation to the Consortium*);

To do so, we first sought to recreate the path that led to the development and definition of the concept of “typicality”, we then analyzed a case-study in particular, that of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, one of the most renowned in the world. This case-study is particularly significant for two reasons. The first concerns the relevance of this product, since Parmigiano-Reggiano (in terms of reputation and volume of business) is one of the world’s most widespread and well-known cheeses. The second instead relates to the bulk and variety of sources referring to this food item which spans an extremely long period of time and thus allows an extensive investigation with a broad scope to answer the questions posed by the present article.

Amy Trubek has recently shed light on the process by which, during the first half of the 20th century, France was able to establish a system grounded on food typicality, setting a model for all of the following experiences of this kind. The legal protection granted by the *appellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC), added to the systematisation of regional cuisines carried out by renowned cookbook writers, determined a close link between “place and taste” that strongly supported the reputation of typical food and drinks.² Trubek justly stresses the important role of food technicians and opinion makers – “tastemakers and taste producers” – as she calls them, suggesting in some way that the historical process that supported the rise of place-based food was an “organised” construction.³

However, one must not underestimate the economic side of this process that other scholars have emphasised, underlining the role played by the market and, more in particular, by long distance trade. If Julia Csergo has argued that in France differences among regional cuisines started to be appreciated when, by the end of the 18th century, typical foods began to be extensively traded outside their own area of production, Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari have put forward an even closer link between commerce and gastronomical identities. According to them, the rise of local food traditions in Late Medieval Italy is to be considered a by-product of the urban economic revival and of the intra-regional trade upsurge of that period.⁴

Stefano Magagnoli the third (*The Marketing of Parmigiano-Reggiano between Tradition and Innovation*). We would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their comments and Catriona Grant for her language corrections.

² Amy B. TRUBEK, *The Taste of Place: a Cultural Journey into Terroir* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2008), pp. 18-53.

³ Amy B. TRUBEK, *The Taste of Place*..., p. 21.

⁴ Julia CSERGO, “L’emergere delle cucine regionali: la Francia” in J.-L. FLANDRIN, M. MONTANARI (eds.), *Storia dell’alimentazione* (2nd ed., Roma, 2007), pp. 643-655; Italian translation of “L’emergence des cuisines régionales” in J.-L. FLANDRIN, *Histoire de l’alimentation* (Paris, 1996), pp. 823-841; Alberto CAPATTI, Massimo MONTANARI, *La cucina italiana. Storia di una cultura*, (3rd ed., Roma/Bari, 2005), pp. vii-xvi.

Holding on to the idea that typicality is a consciously organised historical process, this article will try to extend the field of enquiry to its economic features by focussing on place-based food marketing strategies. It will be argued that among those who fostered the building of a system that “valorizes people, place *and* taste”⁵ a wider set of players, like pre-industrial merchant-capitalists and agro-food industries, should be included.

In the Late Middle Ages, “designation of origin” started to be used in large-scale trading as a means of guaranteeing quality which retailers could then offer end consumers.⁶ However, the restrictions imposed by perishability limited this trading to a very small number of typical food products: spices, nuts, vintage and fortified wines, certain cheeses and cured meats. However, following the trading of goods coming from the colonies, product origin as an element of qualitative distinction seemed to grow. On the verge of the *Retailing Revolution*, retailers and consumers were used to classifying and appreciating products based on their place of origin. For example, in the English mid-19th century market, the basket of place-based food and drinks includes sugar, tea, coffee, nuts, wines, spirits, cheese, citrus fruit, pasta, etc.

With the achievements of the agro-food industry and brand development, product origin ran the risk of becoming outmoded. Analysis of advertising posters and product labels from the early 20th century shows that part at least of the industry used origin as a promotional instrument. This was frequently an idealised or even fictitious reference, which nonetheless did stimulate the senses by leveraging exotic images that recalled the aromas and flavours of far-off lands – once the province of a restricted minority. As a result, geographical origin ended up being one of the mechanisms the agri-food sector used to convey the idea of taste and product quality. In this sense, the Parmigiano-Reggiano case is quintessential, since its “designation of origin” has been used by long-range trading since the end of the 14th century. After the Middle Ages, this designation was joined by others (Piacentino, Lodigiano, etc.) which tended to reduce the promotional impact of its typicality. In the 19th century, many producers seemed to relegate origin to second place, focusing much more on their own individual brand and on other product qualities. Starting from the 1930s, with the establishment of the Consortium, the industry decided to ditch individual brand names in favour of a collective one, thereby bolstering identification with the area of production. But, as we shall see, this process was all but straightforward and immediate, and would not be fully accomplished until the 1970s.

⁵ Amy B. TRUBEK, Sarah BOWEN, “Creating the Taste of Place in the United States: Can We Learn from the French?”, *GeoJournal*, vol. 73 (2008), pp. 23-30, p. 25.

⁶ We adopt the term *designation* to stress a rather broad and informal reference to areas of origin that have been used for centuries to identify and to distinguish among food products. Such choice is consciously made to avoid confusion with terms such as *indication* and *denomination* that, though similar, more directly refer to product protection enforced by law.

2. Methodology and sources

This paper puts forward the first results of a broader ongoing investigation of communication strategies used by the agro-food industry to promote mass consumption, by associating goods to traditions of a particular *terroir* and/or to distinctive elements of typicality (raw materials, skills and techniques, etc.).⁷ Labels, promotional campaigns and packaging are the main objects of enquiries that, though individually undertaken by the authors, merge together in a collective research activity.⁸

The approach that will be followed embodies one of the main concepts put forward by “emotional marketing” scholars, who argue that consumers cannot be considered as fully rational agents, given the fact that often subjective and impulsive features prevail in the purchasing process. A number of studies stress the relevance of emotional factors in consumers’ preferences, questioning therefore in depth neo-classic economic assumptions: consumer’s choices are based on rationality and depend on the degree of information that they have access to.⁹

Since personal and irrational perceptions that influence purchasing decisions are determined by the ability in activating the consumer’s senses, to convince customers that a given item is indispensable and irreplaceable, companies need to convey the most appropriate sensory stimuli. It is in emotional marketing studies that this approach was first adopted, by shifting the emphasis from the intrinsic properties of a product to the way such a product

⁷ Instead of the term *territory*, we have chosen to use the French word *terroir*, given its strong pregnancy that goes way beyond the physical features of a determined place; see Amy B. TRUBEK, Sarah BOWEN, “Creating the Taste of Place ...” p. 27.

⁸ The current article is part of a wider research on typicality that the three authors have undertaken within the *Food Lab. Laboratorio per la storia dell'alimentazione del Dipartimento di Economia dell'Università di Parma*. Moving from the “Italian case”, this research intends to cover a wider geographical area, including several countries; the period taken into analysis goes from the Late Middle Ages to the 20th century, with a particular focus on the stage in each nation that follows industrialisation. See Stefano MAGAGNOLI, “L’invenzione ‘industriale’ della tradizione: il cartello dell’Aceto balsamico tradizionale di Modena”, *Food & History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2005), pp. 225-263; Alberto GRANDI, Stefano MAGAGNOLI, *Contrefaçon ou démocratisation du luxe? Les avatars du Vinaigre balsamique de Modène*, paper presented at the conference *Luxes et internationalisation XIV^e-XIX^e siècles* (Neuchâtel, 25-27 June, 2009), whose proceedings are forthcoming; Giovanni CECCARELLI, Stefano MAGAGNOLI, *Avatar: entre tradition et innovation. Un modèle historique et économique pour les produits typiques*, paper presented at the conference *Les trajectoires de l’innovation de l’agroalimentaire et la construction européenne* (Tours, 6-7 May, 2010); Alberto GRANDI, Giovanni CECCARELLI, Stefano MAGAGNOLI, *Avatar: la costruzione di un modello storico-economico per i prodotti tipici*, paper presented at the conference *La tipicità nella storia. Tradizione, innovazione e territorio* (Parma/Langhirano, 9-11 September, 2010), whose proceedings are forthcoming.

⁹ Maura FRANCHI, *Il cibo flessibile. Nuovi comportamenti di consumo* (Roma, 2009); Maura FRANCHI, Augusto SCHIANCHI, *Scelte economiche e neuroscienze. Razionalità, emozioni e relazioni* (Roma, 2009).

is perceived by purchasers. These insights have been moreover confirmed by “sensory marketing” fieldwork results, which suggest the exploitation of selling techniques and promotional strategies, centred on a combined activation of consumer senses.

This study borrows from semiotics the “syncretic text” tool of analysis, by which it is possible to decode those texts “in which several languages are taking place together” irrespective thus of “the particular essence in which the text manifests itself”. Such an approach turns out to be extremely useful in interpreting iconographic sources and advertisements, given its great “structuring power”, i.e. “its capability of producing more *intelligibility*, *pertinence* and *differentiation*”.¹⁰ By assuming the existence of a plurality of linguistic codes within a text or in an image it is hence possible to detect their hidden structure and to unveil their multiple meanings, distinguishing basic features, differences and mutual relations.¹¹

The sources used in this article are a selection taken, on the one hand, from some of the fullest collections of late 19th-early 20th century advertisement posters and food labels (the *Raccolta Salce* of the *Museo Civico Baito* of Treviso and the collection of the *Museo Enogastronomico* of Solopaca) and, on the other hand, from documents in the archives of the *Parmigiano-Reggiano Consortium* in Parma including posters, newspaper and magazine advertisements, radio and television commercials, informative leaflets, promotional cookbooks, etc. Other references are taken from studies relating to the Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (though not very extensive and at times celebratory), and some scholarly work on *Carosello*, the first Italian television programme exclusively dedicated to advertisements, in which a number of commercials were broadcast between 1956 and 1977.¹²

¹⁰ Maria Pia POZZATO, “L’analisi del testo e la cultura di massa nella socio-semiotica”, in Roberto GRANDI, *I mass media fra testo e contesto. Informazione, pubblicità, intrattenimento, consumo sotto analisi* (Milano, 1992), p. 194 and 196; the translation is by the present authors, original in italics.

¹¹ Giulia CERIANI, “Dal sincretico al sinestesico: le metafore del sensibile”, in Roberto GRANDI (ed.), *Semiotica al marketing. Le tendenze della ricerca nel marketing, nel consumo, nella pubblicità* (Milano, 1994) and Dina RICCO, *Sinestesie per il design. Le interazioni sensoriali nell’epoca dei multimedia* (Milano, 1999).

¹² Emilio SANI, *Il “parmigiano reggiano” dalle origini ad oggi* (Reggio Emilia, 1958); Mario ZANNONI, *Il parmigiano-reggiano nella storia* (Collecchio, 1999); Franco BONILAUDI (ed.), *Il parmigiano reggiano: un simbolo di cultura e civiltà* (Milano, 2001); Associazione dei Musei del Cibo della provincia di Parma, *Parmigiano-Reggiano: uno scrigno di storia e tradizione* (Parma, 2008). Marco GIUSTI, *Il grande libro di Carosello* (Milano, 1995); Paola AMBROSINO, Dario CIMORELLI, Marco GIUSTI (eds.), *Carosello: non è vero che tutto fa brodo: 1957-1977* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1996); Piero DORFLES, *CAROSELLO* (Bologna 1998).

3. The “Construction” of Typicality

Citrons from Messina, lemons from Malaga, raisins from Patras, pineapples from the West Indies, dried figs from Turkey and oranges from Lisbon, then wines from Marsala and Tenerife, from Champagne and the Rhineland and even cheese from Neuchâtel (in addition to that from Parma, of course). The good housewife, as described in home economy books of an England on the brink of the *Retailing Revolution*, had to cope with a real jungle of products, whose quality (and price) often depended on a “designation of origin”.¹³ Indeed, London consumers, who could rely on the mid 19th century’s best-supplied and most varied food market in the world, had long been used to associating origin with a specific product.¹⁴ This applied in particular to non-food products, for which the liaison with the area of origin (that had existed since the end of the 12th-13th century) acted as an indicator of a quality which was guaranteed at source by craftsmen’s guilds, and, on end markets, by middlemen operating at an international level. This phenomenon was so widespread that, already in the 14th century, numerous examples of counterfeits/imitations leveraging “designation of origin” and distorting it were recorded. In modern times, this mechanism has become so common that origins, which are totally fictitious yet evocative for consumers, have often been used by British retailers as a marketing technique.¹⁵ If, by and large, the path leading to an association of goods with places is multi-faceted and many-sided, for food products the sequence of events seems even more complicated. Until the 15th and 16th centuries, only a handful of foods and drinks had developed a “designation of origin”, reputed to the point of establishing itself on faraway markets. Apart from Parma’s cheese – to which we shall return presently – a fairly renowned case is that of the wines called Malvasia, a term once used to identify several Greek dried grape wines which took their name from the first collection and re-exporting centre: the port of Monemvasia in the Peloponnese.¹⁶

After the Middle Ages the process through which products come to establish a solid link to their area of origin continues to be hazy. Given the lack of studies that directly confront such issues, in particular for the 16th and 17th

¹³ John H. WALSH, *A manual of domestic economy: suited to families spending from £100 to £1000 a year* (London, 1856), pp. 242-334.

¹⁴ On differences regarding butter Peter MATHIAS, *Retailing Revolution. A History of Multiple Retailing in the Food Trades Based Upon the Allied Suppliers Group of Companies* (London, 1967), pp. 130-132.

¹⁵ Luciana FRANGIONI, *Milano. Fine Trecento: il carteggio milanese dell'Archivio Datini di Prato* vol. 1 (2 vols. Milano, 1994), pp. 292-298; Nancy C. COX, Karin DANNEHL, *Perceptions of retailing in early modern England* (Ashgate, 2007), pp. 114-120.

¹⁶ Tim UNWIN, *Storia del vino* (Roma, 1993), pp. 181-182, Italian translation of *Wine and the Vine: an Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade* (London/New York, 1991).

centuries, it is only possible to draw on some scattered scholarly references that deal with place-based foods.¹⁷ We suggest, however, that the association between geography and food may be better explained by distinguishing three realms in which this connection seems to be more visible: 1) the typical “local”; 2) the typical “international”; 3) the typical “colonial”. The first association (a good example being Mortadella from Bologna) was developed at a city level by guilds of craftsmen; as a consequence, the product’s characteristics were laid down in a fairly precise way and its identification with the geographical area was relatively rapid. However, typicality, as a guarantee of quality – also for end consumers – had to make great efforts to emerge from local or regional sales channels.¹⁸

In the typical “international” association, the “designation of origin” tended also to coincide with a city, yet reference was no longer to the place of production/processing but to the export centre. Product features were determined by middlemen who managed long-distance trade in relation to end market’s demand.¹⁹ Even when the supply chain became longer, typicality continued to play a certain role in steering consumer choice. The upsurge in Portuguese and Spanish fortified wines was the clearest example of this path.²⁰ In the perhaps self-contradictory typical “colonial” association – of which a good model is tea – the importance of commercial intermediation continued to grow whilst reference to origin became definitely generic, coinciding more and more with a rather extensive geographical area. In the end, this vague form of typicality only concerned European wholesalers because the product underwent additional processing steps (hand-made, but also industrial) before being retailed.²¹

¹⁷ A major aim of the conference *La tipicità nella storia. Tradizione, innovazione e territorio* (Parma/Langhirano, 9-11 September, 2010), was to fill the lack of studies on typicality and to provide a first general framework on this historical issue. Besides the already cited pioneering work by Julia Csergo, for a recent effort in this direction see Philippe MEYZIE, *La table du Sud-Ouest et l’émergence des cuisines régionales (1700-1850)* (Rennes, 2007).

¹⁸ Alessandro CERVELLATI, Giovanni POGGI, *Storia della mortadella, overro, il suino a Bologna* (Bologna, 1972). A sign that *Bologna sausage* (i.e. Mortadella) was considered by foreigners a novelty still in the late 17th century can be found in Ellis VERYARD, *An account of Divers Choice Remarks ... Taken in a Journey through the Low Countries, France, Italy and Part of Spain* (London, 1701), pp. 146-147.

¹⁹ Massimo MONTANARI, “Cultura dell’alimentazione” in Federica CENGARLE (ed.), *L’Italia alla fine del Medioevo: i caratteri originali nel quadro europeo*, vol. 2 (2 vols., Firenze, 2006), pp. 274-275.

²⁰ David HANCOCK, “Commerce and Conversation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic: The Invention of Madeira Wine”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 29, n. 2 (1998), pp. 197-219. On Porto wine, see Tim UNWIN, *Una storia del vino ...*, pp. 263-268.

²¹ David ALEXANDER, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), pp. 112-113.

It was however in the typical “colonial” association that the first examples of using a food product’s origin for promotional purposes were to be found; for instance, in the early 18th century English *China Shops*. These shops accompanied the sale of tea with that of Chinese items (ceramic cups, vases and plates) thus leveraging the evocative power that the Orient had on consumers at that time. But fashions are fickle and it was not long until this (conceivably unconscious) attempt came to an end.²² However, with the *China Shops* the use of a geographical area as a marketing tool had somehow paved the way. All it needed was a new fashion to come along: that of the *Grand Tour*. This phenomenon was studied by Nancy Cox and Karin Dannehl, with special reference to a type of shop that became popular in London in the late 18th century: *Italian Warehouses*. These establishments combined food and non-food products which had the common fact of being (allegedly more than genuinely) of Italian origin. Aside from some authentic typical products (vermicelli, *Bologna sausages*, lemon and orange trees), they also sold improbable soaps from Naples, molasses from Venice, hats from Leghorn and liqueurs from Florence. This was thus a contrived typicality which leveraged that image of an exotic Italy being conveyed by fashionable travel literature. This image was deliberately disseminated by *Italian Warehouses* through advertising postcards showing some of the most famous views of Italian cities, with the clear aim of inducing consumers to associate the products for sale with those far-off worlds laden with charm.²³

Confirmation that geographical pull was gaining ground as a valuable promotional technique was the case of tea in the first half of the 19th century, as recently studied by Jon Stobart. Retailers focussed heavily on kindling imagery: Chinese exoticism was linked to the myth of British colonial power. On the one hand, iconographic references to product origin were an absolute “must” in advertising postcards and in shop décor, with oriental motifs and prints of Chinese landscapes reminding the buyer of the taste of a product coming from afar. On the other hand, the constant reference to tea’s genuineness in newspaper adverts leveraged the trustworthiness of the go-between, in this case the *East India Company*, which dealt with its import and wholesale: a veritable pillar of imperial power protecting against adulterations caused by illegal trade. One hundred years after the initial *China Shops* venture, the time was therefore ripe to once again use origin to promote tea.²⁴

²² Hoh-Cheung MUI, Lorna H. MUI, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989) pp. 60 and 178.

²³ Nancy C. COX, Karin DANNEHL, *Perceptions of retailing ...*, pp. 120-126. On 18th century travel literature and food origin see Julia CSERGO, “L’emergere delle cucine ...”, pp. 643-645.

²⁴ Jon STOBART, “Exotic or everyday? Advertising groceries in Georgian England” paper presented at the CHORD workshop *Retailing History: Texts and Images* (29 April, 2009). The subject is partially discussed also in Jon STOBART, “Selling (through) politeness: advertising provincial shops in eighteenth-century”, *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2008), pp. 309-328.

If we move to the early 20th century and consider labels, advertising boards and newspaper advertisements it would seem that reference to origin as a means to promote food products was well established. In the next pages the preliminary results of an ongoing survey on this particular type of sources will be provided and discussed. Though the sample taken into analysis is consistent and includes materials coming from several countries (Italy, France, the USA, etc.), our remarks have no claim for being conclusive.²⁵ Furthermore a number of other features tend to complicate the general framework: 1) advertisement strategies could change from one nation to another, since they referred to a variety of situations in terms of diet, degree of industrialisation, development of retail systems and social and cultural conditions; 2) the context changed from promotion by the store to that by the manufacturer, shifting from the product to the brand; 3) in this phase, agri-food industries and advertisers were using many other themes to promote itself; for example luxury (as we will see in the Parmigiano-Reggiano case), reference to children, to animal strength, etc.²⁶

Here we would simply like to highlight the continuity (with respect to the 18th-19th centuries) of certain images which, leveraging an ideal and generic origin, were used to convey the double message of distance, in its meaning of “exoticism”, and of guaranteed quality. As to the first element, the geographically defined product is offered as a substitute for a journey to far-off enchanting lands, a sensory trip to be undertaken through “sight” (and implicitly through “taste”). Exoticism is conveyed by more or less direct images, constantly highly evocative of an origin which may be real (but also imaginary), and precise (but also woolly).

Some advertisements are based on a close identification of products with the location which, at least on an imaginative level, they are associated. Views of Vesuvius were used as an obvious reference to Naples by various canned tomatoes producers, like Carmine Cirillo and del Forno (Fig. 1);²⁷ several European pasta manufacturers (Baroni, in France, Rodriguez in Spain, Pianigiani in Italy) established a more sophisticated link to the city

²⁵ For the sources we refer to, see above paragraph 1. *Methodology and sources*. One of the research projects undertaken by *Food Lab*, the *Imago food project* aims at creating an iconographic database of available images related to 19th-20th century food advertisement.

²⁶ On changing patterns of consumption see Jean-Louis FLANDRIN, “Il XIX e XX secolo”, Hans Jürgen TEUTEBERG, Jean-Louis FLANDRIN, “Trasformazioni del consumo alimentare” and Yves PÉHAUT, “L’invasione dei prodotti d’oltremare” both in J.-L. FLANDRIN, M. MONTANARI (eds.), *Storia dell’alimentazione ...*, respectively at pp. 561-566, 567-583 and 584-599. On the differences concerning national retail systems and their interaction with industrialisation see John BENSON, Gareth SHAW (eds.), *The Evolution of Retail Systems, c. 1800-1914* (Leicester, 1992).

²⁷ A complete dossier of the iconographic sources cited in this article can be found at the following stable URL <http://foodlab.unipr.it/tasteoftypicality/pictures/>.



Fig. 1. Canned tomatoes label, *Felice del Forno* [Italy, ca. 1925]. Colour plate 6.

of Naples through a symbolic character like Punch (Fig. 2; see note 27).²⁸ In the United States, Italian foodstuff was promoted through a broader iconography, made of historical characters or geographical suggestions. The paladin Renault and Giuseppe Garibaldi, for instance, were printed on the packages of two 1920s Philadelphia pasta brands (Stella Importing Company, and Pasquale Giunta and Sons) while a map of Italy on the “Bel Sole Macaroni” label hinted at a purely symbolic origin, at a surrogate masking an ultra-American product from Pennsylvania (Fig. 3; see note 27).

Similar strategies can be easily found referring to colonial goods and tropical fruit, but here geographical allusions become vaguer. Evocation is conveyed by exotic (yet unlikely) panoramas, or by the mere suggestion of journeys to far-off worlds to promote coffee (Comptoir des Colonies, Maxwell House), pineapples (S. Jose fruit packaging Company and Selma canning Company), and coconuts (Fig. 4). In some iconographies of this latter type of foodstuff, the second trend of advertising linked to origin also emerges: guarantee of quality. This was an obvious reference to a rich and happy “Golden Land”, some Arcadian countryside aiming at reassuring consumers of product genuineness. Further examples of exotic versions of this motif include: a Mediterranean variant used by French olive oil producers (for instance Louis Barral, and the Union des propriétaires de Nice), and even a Hollywood and modernist version used to promote a chewing-gum brand (Fig. 5).

In this series of advertisements, an opulent, colourful, but also idealised (thus readily understandable) “Mother Nature”, meant to stimulate smell and taste, was coupled with reassuring, smiling female characters. During the 1920s the graphic artist Leonetto Capiello depicted this motif for various canned fruit and preserves brands, like Barbier Dauphin, Foucault or Cirio (Fig. 6 & 7; see note 27). The implicit reference to the myth of Mother Earth as a certification of

²⁸ This was however a well-established iconographic cliché, see the images in Madeleine FERRIÈRES, *Histoires de cuisines et trésor des fourneaux* (Paris, 2008), pp. 132-133.

quality has on occasion been reinforced by images of wealth, or the cornucopia, which turned the product into a “treasure” to be enjoyed with the senses. In the early decades of the 20th century a series of iconographic stereotypes referring to food origin was to become embedded in memory, ready to be retrieved whenever producers and advertisers considered such references functional to marketing purposes. It is no wonder then, that Parmigiano-Reggiano avoids resorting to these stereotypes for its promotional strategies until after the 1960s, when historical and geographical rooting would become issues fashionable enough to be rediscovered.

4. From Designation to the Consortium

The fame of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese outside its production area is documented at least as far back as the 14th century. In the whole of Northern and Central Italy, it was one of the most appreciated and expensive products, so much so that it was mentioned by Boccaccio as a symbol of opulence and good living.

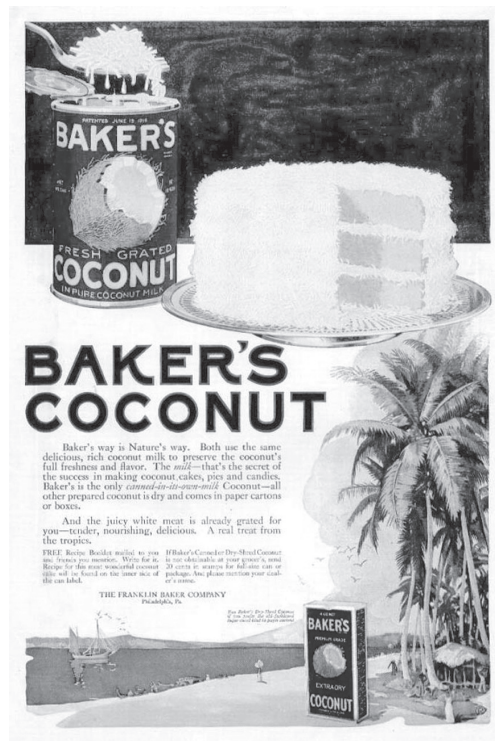


Fig. 4. Newspaper advertisement, canned and dry coconut, *Franklin Baker Company* [USA, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, December-March, 1920]. Colour plate 7.

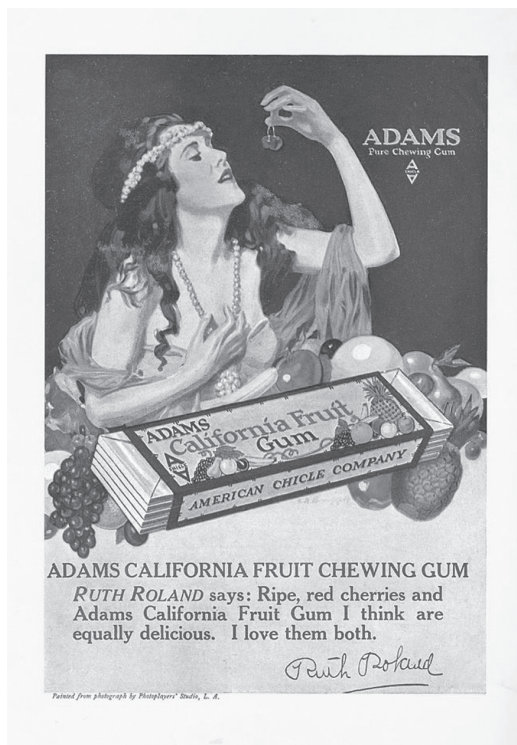


Fig. 5. Newspaper advertisement, chewing-gum, *Adams California Fruit Gum* [USA, *The Red Cross Magazine*, September, 1919]. Colour plate 8.

“... in a country called Bengodi, in which the vines are tied with sausages, [...] where there is also a high mountain of Parmesan grated cheese, whereon dwell people whose sole employ is to make macaroni and other dainties, boiling them with capon broth, and afterwards throwing them out to all who choose to catch them...”. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron, Eighth Day, Novella III*.

In the renowned *Libro de arte coquinaria* written in the 15th century by the Italian cook Maestro Martino de Rossi, parmesan cheese (“Cascio Parmesciano”, as the cook names it) is virtually the only food product identified by its origin. Likewise, two centuries later, in Vincenzo Tanara’s *L’economia del cittadino in villa*, Parma cheese is among the few place-based foods that are mentioned.²⁹

²⁹ Maestro Martino, *Libro de arte coquinaria*, digital edition by Candida Martinelli: <http://www.uni-giessen.de/gloning/tx/martino2.htm>, p. 42, accessed 6 October 2010; Vincenzo TANARA, *L’economia del cittadino in villa* (Venezia, 1674), p. 169, pp. 172-173.

Clearly, being an expensive product, it needed some sort of guarantee regarding its origin³⁰ and, by the same token, this task was fulfilled by the middlemen: it was the importer who assured buyers regarding the cheese's origin.³¹ In turn, the importer had to rely on trustworthy local merchants from Parma, who needed to guarantee not so much the origin (something obvious considering where it had been purchased) but the quality of the cheese, which had to be equal to its fame and price.

Consequently, from the Middle Ages onwards, "designation of origin" became – even if not officially – a must for those food products (such as Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese) which were consumed outside the production area. This was an issue involving traders in a game of mutual guarantees that obviously had costs, which could however be easily shifted onto the end consumers who were little, or not at all, sensitive to price. Nonetheless, on looking more closely, the place of origin of a product in pre-industrial economies was frequently a guarantee of quality in itself, thus the case of Parma's cheese was far from being an exception. Numerous, more or less valuable articles (e.g. silk fabrics, glassware, leather goods, etc.) were also named after and identified with where they were produced, and appreciated for this very reason.

This strong identification between product and area of origin imposed very strict controls over production systems. With regard to fabrics or other manufactured goods, this control was performed by urban guilds, whereas for food products, which were almost always produced in the countryside, it was traders who selected those manufacturers who were more attentive to quality. Essentially, only those who produced high quality cheese and cured meat could have access to the rich international markets that meant major profitability. It was therefore the opening up to foreign markets which obliged an increase in quality standards. The trader could not afford to place on the market any cheese from Parma unable to meet the standards of very demanding consumers, who were willing to pay very high prices for it. When this type of consumer bought Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, they wanted to be sure of product quality. This opening up to markets which were distant from the production area required great attention to product quality. This kind of quality control was the main duty of the middlemen and, since manufacturing systems were still archaic and

³⁰ Guarantees about the origin the quality of products are peculiar to every luxury good (food and non-food ones), which are constantly exposed to attempts of imitation and counterfeiting. The *ancien régime* guild system was for many centuries an effective response to such risks. See, for instance, Alberto GUENZI, Paola MASSA, Angelo MOIOLI, *Guilds, Markets and Work Regulations in Italy, 16th-19th centuries* (Aldershot, 1998). On the relation between imitation, counterfeiting and innovation see Ricky WILKE, Judith Linne ZAICHKOWSKY, "Brand Imitation and its Effects on Innovation, Competition and Brand Equity", *Business Horizons*, vol. 42, no. 6 (1999), pp. 9-18.

³¹ Maria GIAGNACOVO, *Formaggi in tavola. Commercio e consumo del formaggio nel basso Medioevo* (Roma, 2007).

extremely empirical, this control could be performed only *ex-post*, i.e. at the end of the production and maturation process, just before shipment to the end market.

Based on the reputation already enjoyed by Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese in the Late Middle Ages, this process of improving quality may conceivably have begun at some point of the 13th and 14th centuries. If this is so, therefore, the much vaunted pre-eminence by Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese producers is very likely. The strong geographical rooting also is a fact. The dairy industry in this part of the Po Plain (which roughly embraces the present-day provinces of Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna and Mantua) certainly saw major economic activity. Large land estates, sharecropping farms, convents and monasteries were all involved in this production which, as we saw, ensured large profits. In its crucial phase however, it was concentrated in the so-called “*caselli*” (generally small family-run dairies).

It is not to be excluded that the “designation of origin” is the result of an historical process focussed on trading channels and communication routes, more than on the actual production techniques used. In this sense Parma was the place where dairy production from a much wider area was concentrated, and subsequently shipped from. This process was also fostered by the better exchange power that a cheese “from Parma” (i.e. shipped from Parma) enjoyed on the market. Clearly, this enlargement process had its limits, beyond which it was no longer convenient for manufacturers to have their products shipped from Parma, rather to turn to other trading or shipping centres.

From a quantitative point of view, the “great leap” supposedly took place between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. As a result of the expansion of the markets and the developments in transport, the demand of products like Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese had a strong increase. At this stage, individual producers tried to exploit the reputation of Parma and its surroundings as a marketing tool. Several advertising boards of the 19th and early 20th centuries show that this process was fairly consistent. The few producers who succeeded in exporting directly tried to enhance their brand without distancing themselves too much from the “collective” image of a product that coincides with an area. On the other hand, the middlemen, who amassed and sold products from hundreds of micro-units, were exceedingly interested in eliminating individual brands, as it had happened before, in order to sell a product which was as homogeneous as possible, and whose price was easier to control. These two trends eventually converged towards a more logical and profitable solution also for those producers in a position to export directly, who, by giving up their brand, found fewer problems from a commercial point of view and, above all, became part of a much more controlled market.

This process was confirmed in the most complex period in Italy’s commercial history. Indeed, in the second half of the 19th century, Parmigiano-Reggiano was, together with Grana Padano and Fontina, the only dairy

product to be found permanently on the international markets, despite the exceptional normative instability.³² Especially for Grana and Parmigiano, exports were clearly supported by the unique role that these cheeses played in the national and international cuisine. They were often considered ingredients more than products, and thus essential for a number of recipes.³³ To some extent it was the same mechanism which, for example, supported exports of certain wines from the South, which were rarely consumed directly but were nonetheless considered indispensable for the wine industry, in particular the French one, since they were "blending wines" used to adjust the alcoholic content of local wines.³⁴

This is also why Parmigiano-Reggiano was the first typical product to be protected by a standard. Equally, the producers of this cheese were the first to come together in a Consortium, even if the process that led to the creation of such a collective institution was anything but straightforward. In 1901 it was the Chamber of Commerce of Reggio Emilia which proposed the setting up of a trade union for cheese producers and traders to provide a guarantee of authenticity of products destined for export. Thus right from the start, the project was closely linked to a strategy aimed at international markets. The Reggio-Emilia Consortium of 1901 was too weak and too limited geographically, since it excluded *de facto* the producers from the provinces of Parma, Modena and Mantua and, for this reason, had to deal with the hostility of the economic and political organisations from these areas. In spite of this, the experience served as a model and paved the way for subsequent collective activities.

In any case, the producers from Reggio-Emilia clearly considered their cheese decidedly (though not substantially) different from the one produced in Parma and in the other provinces (which form today's area of origin). These distinctions and this terminological confusion are testified also by other sources. The renowned economist Stefano Jacini pointed out that the name "Parmigiano" was used to indicate "grana-type" cheeses produced in Lombardy and, in turn, this cheese was often very different in quality levels.³⁵

³² Francesco CHIAPPARINO, *Tra polverizzazione e concentrazione. L'industria alimentare dall'Unità al periodo tra le due guerre*, in A. CAPATTI, A. DE BERNARDI, A. VARNI (eds.), *Annali della storia d'Italia*, vol. 13, *L'alimentazione* (Torino, 1998), p. 239.

³³ For such use of parmesan that, since the Late Middle Ages, was the only one known in areas outside those of production see Massimo MONTANARI, "Cultura dell'alimentazione ...", p. 275, Alberto CAPATTI, Massimo MONTANARI, *La cucina italiana ...*, pp. 57-67. Also see early 19th century French and English cookbooks: Charles-Yves COUSIN D'AVALLON, *Nouveau dictionnaire de cuisine, d'office et de pâtisserie* (Paris, 1826), pp. 234 and 326; Duncan MACDONALD, *The new London family cook: or, Town and country housekeeper's guide* (London, 1808), pp. 102, 132, 169 and 237.

³⁴ Tim UNWIN, *Storia del vino...*, pp. 297-299.

³⁵ Stefano JACINI, *La proprietà fondiaria e le popolazioni agricole in Lombardia*, (Milano, 1854), p. 65. Similar statements can be found, around 1840, in Valery's reputed travel guide: "Fromage

Sometime midway through the 19th century, the name seemed therefore to indicate a type of cheese, more than its origin in a strict sense, but this name also proved to be an extraordinary marketing tool on markets which were more or less far from the production area. At this stage, the name “Parmigiano” would seem to have almost totally absorbed other designations (Lodigiano, Lombardo, Milanese, etc.) which nonetheless enjoyed remarkable reputations since the Middle Ages, in Italy and beyond.³⁶

An additional step towards the birth of the Consortium was taken in 1909, when, in an attempt to find a solution to the problem of authenticating the origin, representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Parma, Reggio, Modena and Mantua met to find common ground for a hypothetical branding of the grana-type cheese produced in these four provinces. There were protracted discussions on the name that the cheese should use in national and foreign markets. But until the end of the First World War, the problem found no final solution.

As mentioned before, the grana cheeses produced in the four provinces undoubtedly had different characteristics. On the other hand, even though standardisation attempts had been going on for some time, the production processes were still essentially empirical, and those few practical manuals which existed were badly written and far from reliable.³⁷ The production facilities, mostly based on small-sized dairy farms, furthered this sort of “qualitative fragmentation” of the product. At the end of the 19th century, we can say that Parmigiano did not exist, but there were several, very similar grana-type cheeses: local traditions or the know-how of the individual cheesemaker were able to introduce primary qualitative elements. The establishment of the Consortium and the coding of a regulation could thus be interpreted as a first attempt to standardise a product which, being totally artisanal, was highly differentiated.

One of the decisive thrusts in this direction was probably determined by the strong expansion of cooperative movements.³⁸ Farmers’ dairy companies and cooperative dairies profoundly changed the organisational structure of the sector in this area. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, cheese production had in effect been almost entirely separated from both the farm and its sale. The dairy was often organised as a service provided by a third-

célèbre, dit de Parme, quoique fait dans la campagne de Lodi”; see Antoine-Claude PASQUIN (VALERY), *L’Italie confortable manuel du touriste: appendice aux voyages historiques, littéraires et artistiques en Italie* (Paris [s.d.]), p. 83.

³⁶ Maria GIAGNACOV, *Formaggi in tavola...*, pp. 74-78.

³⁷ Luigi CAVAZZOLI, *Agricoltura e alimentazione nelle campagne mantovane: 1901-1914*, in Nicoletta AZZI (ed.), *Sapere scientifico e questione sociale tra ‘800 e ‘900* (Mantova, 1984), pp.115-153.

³⁸ Valerio CASTRONOVO, Giuseppe GALASSO, Renato ZANGHERI, *Storia del movimento cooperativo in Italia 1886-1986* (Torino, 1987), pp. 180-182.

party, similar to the milling industry.³⁹ As a result, producers sold their cheese only locally, whereas sales outside the production area were entrusted to middlemen, thus reproducing the organisational model that we find in the Middle Ages. Very few producers could cross provincial borders using their own name and brand. Even with very high export volumes in the second half of the 19th century, the production of those cheeses (that were to become Parmigiano-Reggiano and Grana Padano) was fragmented into small or even tiny units.⁴⁰

The problem of “designation of origin” did not only affect Parmigiano-Reggiano, but also other traditional cheeses which were having to tackle a market with new characteristics. The First World War, which represented a great opportunity for growth in production volumes driven by wartime demand, momentarily set these problems aside. But the difficult post-war situation urged operators and organisations to resume the agenda interrupted on the eve of the Great War. Again, the decisive impulse came from the cooperative movement, which became the promoter, especially in the provinces of Mantua and Reggio, of a powerful process of production innovation and rationalisation.⁴¹ Between 1920 and 1921 the relaunch of the dairy sector became a “must” for administrative institutions and for the economic organizations of the four provinces. As a result, a first permanent interregional committee was established in September 1921 to support the dairy sector with its seat at the Chamber of Commerce of Reggio Emilia. The Committee was made up of 11 members: four representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Parma, Reggio, Modena and Mantua, four representatives of producers from the various provinces, plus three dairy technicians.

The main tasks of the Committee included that of identifying Reggiano cheese (as it was defined) through an analysis of the product’s physical characteristics and taste, and through a definition of the production area. The Committee also had commercial and technical functions, such as supporting dairies in production and maturation phases, as well as exports. In 1926 this “Interprovincial Consortium” in collaboration with some French producers promoted, during the 7th Milk Processing International Conference, a proposal to define the “*names of types of cheese deriving from their region of origin*” in order to prevent fraud to the detriment of buyers. The “designation model” adopted was essentially copied from the AOC system which had been under development in France since the first years of the century.

In 1928 the time was ripe also in Italy. Therefore, upon request of the “Association of Entrepreneurs” and of the “Provincial Council of

³⁹ Francesco CHIAPPARINO, *Tra polverizzazione e concentrazione...*, pp. 235-236.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

⁴¹ Marzio Achille ROMANI, Emilio FANIN (eds.), *Nel solco della terra le radici dello sviluppo: il sistema agro-alimentare a Mantova 1860-2000* (Venezia, 2001), pp. 131-133.

Corporate Economy” (i.e. the “Chamber of Commerce”) of Reggio-Emilia, the “voluntary Consortium for the protection of Grana Reggiano” was founded. The operation which led to the Consortium was basically a commercial initiative, even though purely productive issues were also involved. Indeed, the Consortium had to guarantee that the cheese produced by its members had minimum requirements (maturation, fat percentage, origin of the raw material, etc.), but the main activities were aimed at promoting the product in the domestic and foreign markets.⁴²

This time the operation was immediately welcomed by almost all the producers from Reggio Emilia. Considering the success and undoubted advantages that the Consortium granted producers from Reggio, after several meetings and after accepting the membership of producers from the neighbouring provinces, the *Consorzio Volontario Interprovinciale* (“Interprovincial Voluntary Consortium”) was set up in 1934, with the inclusion of producers from Parma, Modena and Mantua. Finally, in 1937, the production area was enlarged to include the province of Bologna to the west of the river Reno. Only the following year, “protected denomination” of the cheese produced in the area covered by the Consortium was established with a decree as: “Grana Parmigiano-Reggiano”, a denomination which continues to be used today.

The enlargement of (or inclusion in) the production area that started from the province of Reggio-Emilia and then progressively included non-neighbouring areas should probably be interpreted as an answer to the increasingly pressing need to have a stronger critical mass in a period of convulsive transformation in the markets, as well as at an enduring consumption crisis. The operation was immediately seen as a loosening of traditional limitations or, better yet, as a relaxation of the tie between the cheese and its production area, which still existed. The political and cultural climate of the period was indeed particularly favourable to references to tradition and the centuries-old stability of “peasant civilisation”, be it true or alleged. Consequently, the promotional activities of the Consortium were working in the midst of dead ends which were difficult to surmount. On the one hand, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese was strongly characterised by its artisan dimension, but on the other, the amounts produced and standardisation were becoming increasingly more important. While Parmigiano-Reggiano was associated with a specific area of the Po Plain, whose extraordinarily rich soil had long been recognised, it was also known abroad as a classic ingredient of the Italian cuisine in general and could thus enjoy a strong advantage in terms of image, thanks to its “universality”.

No surprise therefore that, after the Second World War, in a profoundly different social and cultural climate, the Consortium tried to “do away with”

⁴² Tim UNWIN, *Storia del vino...*, pp. 316-317.

its history and to make the product “less provincial” in an attempt to pursue that desire for modernity which seemed to be sweeping over consumers throughout the Western hemisphere.

5. The Marketing of Parmigiano-Reggiano Cheese between Tradition and Innovation

The development of the marketing tools used by Parmigiano-Reggiano during the industrial age can be subdivided into two macro-periods: from 1860-1870 until the beginning of the Second World War, and from the end of the war until today. The first period marked the beginning of the industrial production of the cheese and the slow recovery of its development on the markets after the 18th century decline; the second period saw the post-war recovery after the standstill (in both quantity and quality) caused by the war.

The initial stages of both periods therefore had similar objectives: re-accrediting the product after periods of crisis, revitalising the production sector, and regaining market confidence. The communication strategies adopted for the promotion of the product were obviously very different and they were dictated by the differences in context that existed in the various periods (cultural and social, different levels of market integration, different consumption structures, etc.).

5.1 The 19th Century Production Recovery

The ban of the Jesuits from the Duchy of Parma in 1768 caused serious harm to the system for producing Parma’s grana cheese. Skilful innovators of production techniques, they had given an important impetus to developing production methods and improving product quality. Throughout the 18th century, Parma’s economy was exposed to growing competition from the Duchy of Modena, which had modernised production techniques thereby enabling Modena and Reggio’s agriculture to become a fierce competitor of that of Parma, which was instead losing competitiveness and seeing production diminishing in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

A partial recovery took place in the first decades of the 19th century, which were characterised by an evolution in farming techniques (which determined a significant increase in cattle milk productivity, also thanks to the introduction of the Swiss Brown breed). Despite a significant revitalisation of the dairy sector, for the entire 19th century the quality of hard cheese from Reggio continued to stand out, in particular from the area of Bibbiano, where in 1868, 14 dairies were in operation, supported by the Bibbianese Company which was in charge of promoting the product in the domestic and foreign markets.

Actually, towards the end of the 19th century, two virtually identical products coexisted on the market, flanked by (very similar) “imitations” made in the Modena area and in certain areas around Bologna and Mantua. This situation of ambiguity and fragmentation, that risked weakening the product’s competitive potential, was surmounted in the 1930s – as we saw above – through the establishment of the *Consorzio del Grana Tipico*.

In the second half of the 19th century, the up-and-coming grana cheese production sector thus had to deal with two challenges: a) the introduction of profound innovations in processing techniques (the percentage of defective product was still too high); b) the definition of an effective communication strategy to reposition cheese in the market.

Throughout this first phase, the strategy adopted leveraged the fame of individual producers’ brands. Grana cheese wheels are still those traditional “black wheels”⁴³ to which a little metal plate has been affixed with the name of the producing dairy (Fig. 8; see note 27).

In the first decades of the 19th century, significant investments were made in posters, which were occasionally genuine works of art, such as those by Achille Luciano Mauzan for the Bertozzi company (Fig. 9) and by Gino Boccasile for the Tavella company (Fig. 10; see note 27). The distinguished *affiches* made for the Pelagatti firm, a pioneering company in modern parmesan marketing, must also be recalled. A communicative canon centred on the strict equivalence between Parmigiano and luxury is here put forward (Fig. 11-13; see note 27).

In the advertisement board by Boccasile, whose communicative stylistic feature was characterised by an almost maniacal insistence on the olfactory element, a pig-faced chef who is enraptured by the wheel of Parmesan cheese is portrayed (Fig. 10; see note 27). Eyes closed to give absolute priority to smell, the chef seems to be opening up to his craving for Parmesan, anticipating with his nose those savoury and spicy aromas that would go on to satisfy his tastebuds too, metaphorically represented by closed, pouting lips appealing for the longed-awaited product’s kiss. In the equally evocative poster by Mauzan, Parmesan is in the centre of the olfactory focus of three men with huge noses. As evocative as the previous image, this scene is characterised by an increased “materiality”. The faces of the three men look hot and excited by this fragranced proximity to the cheese. Ready to eat it, they first fulfil their collective olfactory need, which only heightens their desire to devour the cheese.

⁴³ In the past, for better product preservation, cheese rinds were covered with a mix of clay, lamp-black and grapestone oil.



Fig. 9. Advertisement poster, Parmigiano-Reggiano *Bertozzi* [Italy, 1930, by L. Mauzan]. Planche 9.

5.2 Post-War Marketing

The beginning of a true communication strategy for the product is recorded in the early sixties, in parallel with the expansion of the markets determined by the economic boom and leveraging also “new media”, such as radio and television. Towards the mid-50s, the Consortium began to give some significant signs of its willingness to promote the image of Parmigiano cheese on the markets. It can be observed that these were still very “primitive” forms of communication which focused on a generic reference to genuineness, plus the face-to-face relationship of trust between seller and consumer which revolved around three key elements: a) the worldwide reputation of the product (“*The whole world knows and appreciates Parmigiano-Reggiano*”); b) the reference to the genuineness of artisan processing (“*The success of a recipe depends [...] on the genuineness of raw materials*”); c) the guarantee offered by the Consortium’s collective brand (“*Only the hot-iron brand guarantees origin and authenticity*”).

The communication tools used were tremendously feeble. A precise definition of a “communication code” which could prevent the risk of the product remaining anonymous was lacking. In 1953 there was no image whatsoever; in 1954 the image was that of the traditional cheese which offered consumers an “anonymous” piece of cheese. Also an explicit reference to the *terroir* was missing. Where are Parma, Reggio Emilia or the Po Plain? The Consortium’s address was limited to a pay-off of questionable effectiveness, which, rather than an evocative or convincing function, seemed to correspond to the purely “bureaucratic” task of “signing” the advertisement.

Also the absence of any reference to the product’s lengthy tradition is worth underlining. Probably this choice was meant to remove the product from its “historical context”, with the idea that an “industrial” advertising packaging would be more effective, especially at a historic moment when the countryside, the very symbol of the past, was vanishing. Consequently, the celebration of “progress” was entrusted to the image of a “modern” product, bought by a woman from the urban middle classes. Between the lines, one might say, a representation of the city that is replacing the countryside.

5.3 The Communication Universe of the Economic Boom

It was only in the years of the economic boom that, strictly speaking, a communication strategy began as a consequence of market expansion, and leveraging also the “new media” such as radio and television.

In 1962, one of the first radio commercials associated Parmigiano-Reggiano with the

“ballad of an ancient and noble cheese, that has been famous for seven centuries [...] with two buckets of good milk you make one kilo of genuine and delicious cheese [...] those who eat it are wise; these are the wheels guaranteed by a hot-iron brand, which is the most creditable brand of all, as every good chef tells us.”⁴⁴

Apart from the hesitant lines, there are four elements to point out: the reference to its ancient lineage as a luxury product; the underlining of its genuineness and the artisan production techniques; the product is guaranteed by the Consortium through hot-iron branding; beyond being directly eaten in its original form as any cheese, Parmigiano-Reggiano can also be transformed (grated) and thus mixed in many culinary preparations. Communication in advertising posters and press articles seems to have become more sophisticated.

In the 1963 campaign (Fig. 14) the reference to tradition (“*for seven centuries, a great cheese*”) is more explicit. It was not yet a complete narrative code, but the gaps from the past had been filled. “Modernity” was being flanked by

⁴⁴ Archivio del Consorzio Parmigiano-Reggiano, fondo comunicazione pubblicitaria, spot radiofonici, 1962.

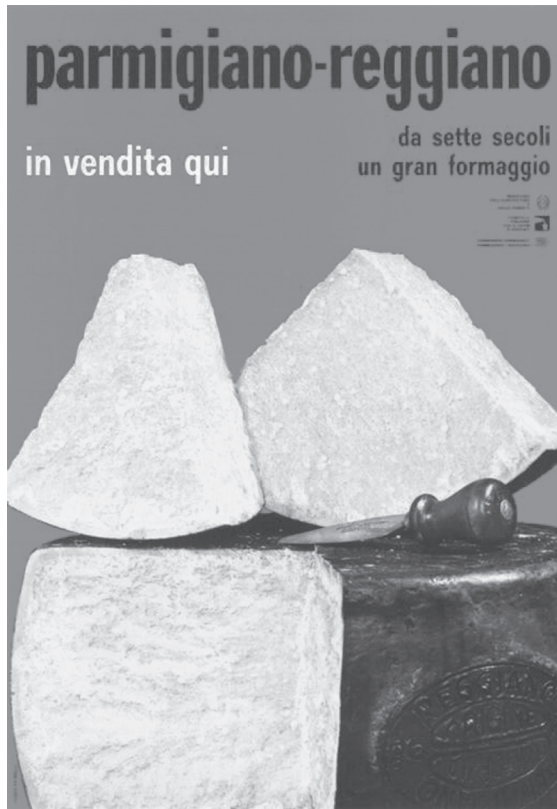


Fig. 14. Advertisement poster [Italy, 1963, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano]. Planche 10.

“Tradition”, for the first time indicating a *syncretism* between tradition and innovation.

Overall, the poster was very elegant. The text had a single headline: “*Parmigiano-Reggiano: for seven centuries, a great cheese.*” Noticeably, there was no other text element to divert attention from this statement. Also the elision of the final syllable of the Italian word “*grande*” is significant. That “*gran*” used in the original text not only endowed the sentence with musicality and rhythm, it also played with an allusion to “*grana*”, the historical designation of Parmigiano but also the name of the product that was to become its chief competitor (Grana Padano).

The 1964 message, significantly resorting to black & white, seems instead remarkably complex. There are several elements to be underlined (Fig. 15):

- 1) The pleasure of tasting distances itself from the act of consumption (“...*buying it means tasting it...*”). Already before using taste, consumers are delighted by the act of buying it;



Fig. 15. Newspaper advertisement [Italy, 1964, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano].

- 2) The use of recalling a memory (“...you taste that flavour [...] which is also enticing your memory...”). There is a clear reference to Proust in this statement. Once the consumer has nibbled at a piece of Parmigiano-Reggiano, the flavour triggers a *madeleine* of the past:⁴⁵ hinting at something or at somebody. It leverages the “memory” of the consumer, attracted not only by the product’s savoury taste, but also by an association with a past event connected to positive sensations and emotions (leaving however anyone free to choose their favourite connection);
- 3) The product “doubles up” (“as a dressing or as a table cheese”): at the same time Parmigiano-Reggiano is both food and dressing; especially for those consumers geographically more distant, this is a short “Instruction Manual”;

⁴⁵ The allusion to Proust’s concept of “madeleine” obviously refers to that of “unintentional memory”, which is stirred by an accidental sensation and that determines (through a nonlogical process) a trip in the past, allowing therefore to “feel” the past as if it was present and to “see” it in its original character. Thus this is the meaning we apply when referring to the concept of “madeleine”, i.e. as evocative criterion (and totally unintentional) to something (or somebody) which is present in past memories. See Walter BENJAMIN, *Per un ritratto di Proust*, in *Ibid.*, *Avanguardia e rivoluzione* (Torino, 1973). On the power that taste has to evoke personal stories, see also Helen BAROLINI, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections* (San Diego, 1988), p. 52.

- 4) It is a familiar product (“...*because you know it well*”): the statement suggests great familiarity, i.e. it proposes the image of a well-known product that resides in everyone’s memory;
- 5) The reference to naturalness (“...*it is a natural product, made today using the same artisan systems as seven centuries ago...*”): it declares not only that the product dates back seven centuries, but that the processing techniques have also remained unchanged;
- 6) The underlining of uniqueness (“...*unique in the world...*”): Parmigiano-Reggiano is “unique” and “exceptional”. There is also the intention to suggest this competitive factor: other cheeses (the competitors) may be good, but they are not unique;
- 7) The price factor (“...*and you pay with pleasure...*”): the product costs more than its competitors. Consumers are asked to make the effort to pay a “premium-price” because the product not only gratifies them but grants them social status.

The headline of the poster used in 1966 is very clear-cut (Fig. 16) and introduces some new elements. With its statement that “*Parmigiano-Reggiano is the husband of Italian cuisine*” the product becomes gendered and dons a precise identity associated with the social role of “husband”. Playing on the evocative function rooted in traditional culture, the product thus assumes the important role that in those years was attributed to the “male householder”.

This is a mimesis based on the metaphorical message that represents Parmigiano-Reggiano as the “husband” associated with a well-groomed female figure, the smiling housewife of an urban family getting to grips with the meat sauce crock.

The text and image are intimately linked, inspiring a “reassuring” message which revolves around traditional family values and thus underlines a reference to tradition, incarnated by the product being advertised. The Parmigiano/husband represents traditional equilibrium in defence of the integrity of a social model which is gradually crumbling away.⁴⁶

Two years later a further leap forward is recorded (Fig. 17). “*This is the table cheese for the man who deserves the best.*” The headline is tightly linked to the poster’s graphics, which illustrate two central elements: the torso of a man sitting in front of a wheel of Parmigiano, on top of which there is a plate with a wedge of cheese and the special little knife to break off small chunks, and the arms of a woman – most probably his wife – who is affectionately

⁴⁶ On changes occurring in Italian society during the 1960s see Guido CRAINZ, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta* (Roma, 1996).

il parmigiano-reggiano è il marito della cucina italiana

marito sì, marito ideale della cucina italiana. Col parmigiano-reggiano si fanno le buone minestre, si preparano le pietanze e le verdure appetitose: arriva lui, e la ricetta più semplice diventa un piatto degno di un pranzo. Sulla pastasciutta e sul riso non se ne può fare a meno, ma va con tutto, o quasi. Da soddisfazione, nel rendimento e nel risultato, perché il parmigiano-reggiano è più che un condimento, è il «cibomanto», che fa della nostra cucina una cucina felice.



solo questo è parmigiano-reggiano: da sette secoli unico al mondo per genuinità e qualità: da sette secoli un gran formaggio

attenzione: il parmigiano-reggiano è unico e non va confuso con formaggi d'imitazione. Ora è marchiato su tutta la forma e la marchiatura si vede anche sul pezzo che si compra



Supplementi della settimana, rigatori rotondi, circolari di pasta di parmigiano-reggiano, prodotti nel 1966, a cura del Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano, che è stato in grado di ottenere il marchio di qualità (che si vede in ogni confezione) di questo formaggio. Parmigiano-Reggiano, prodotto della Vittoria 3 - Reggio Emilia.

CONSORZIO DEL FORMAGGIO PARMIGIANO - REGGIANO

Fig. 16. Newspaper advertisement [Italy, 1966, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano]. Planche 11.

per lui che merita il meglio



questo costa?
il parmigiano-reggiano è un formaggio unico, che per una pasticcina ne basta metà: è vero, ma vale di più sapere che il parmigiano-reggiano è un formaggio grasso? e si digerisce così facilmente, e si sente la differenza anche più a giorni dopo dal pasto.
Per comprare il parmigiano-reggiano è bene guardarsi bene: il vero parmigiano-reggiano ha la marchiatura: se non c'è scritto parmigiano-reggiano, è un formaggio d'imitazione.

questo è il formaggio da tavola parmigiano-reggiano

signora, è lei che offre...

il parmigiano-reggiano è il formaggio da tavola. È un gesto che si fa da secoli, e che si fa oggi con lo stesso orgoglio. Il formaggio unico al mondo per genuinità e qualità: il parmigiano-reggiano.

Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano

82



cinquemila premi

Cinquemila premi da quattro milioni speciali da tavola per parmigiano-reggiano, vennero offerti tra la prima e la seconda guerra mondiale al parmigiano-reggiano. Forme, vennero anche il proprio nome a questo formaggio reggiano, che si trova in tutta Italia (distribuito in tutta Italia) (cinque milioni premi).

(distribuito in tutta Italia)

Fig. 17. Newspaper advertisement [Italy, 1968, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano]. Planche 12.

embracing him. What is singular is that the two characters' faces are missing, that they fill only a small part of the scene, and then only with certain details.

Despite the incomplete representation, their roles and identities are clear. That the man belongs to the urban middle class is testified by his jacket and tie. In reality, this is nothing more than another way of representing the "husband" who appeared in the 1966 text. By his side is his doting wife, sketched in with just enough details to identify who she is; the wedding ring testifies her marital status, the bracelet on her right forearm is that of a woman from a moneyed family while her well-groomed hands with their lacquered nails tell of someone who does not concern herself with housework.

The communicative innovations may be plentiful, but the cultural groove they lie in is comparable. The evocation of the family dimension remains explicit, even though the communicative blueprint appears more "refined", leveraging the more "subtle" visual elements (the wedding ring, the tie, etc.). Moreover the association Parmigiano/husband, which had been overly explicit in the previous campaign, is now simply entrusted to the opening lines of the advertisement (*"for him"*).



Fig. 18. Newspaper advertisement [Italy, 1969, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano]. Planche 13.

A certain weight should be given instead to the text’s “closure” concentrated in the *pay-off*, which comes across as somewhat subversive with respect to the past. In this case, the product is no longer suggested to the consumer exclusively as a “dressing”, but as food to be consumed as a main course. In this way we are riding the crest of the wave of “modernity”, which, especially for people no longer engaged in arduous, taxing manual labour, proposes lighter and lighter lunches, suitable for tackling professional intellectual tasks during the afternoon.

In 1969, Italy was to be swept by an unprecedented wave of workers’ demonstrations, following the massive student protests of the year before. The very same year the Parmigiano publicity machine (Fig. 18) would seem to be winking at the country’s “silent majority”, unfavourable to both protest manifestations.

“A meal in itself”: This single sentence conveys the campaign’s whole message, which marks a radical departure from the past. The family unit has been banished, as has the centrality of the male husband figure as one of the message’s topics. Here we see a complete redirection, right in the the middle of the social protests and upheaval, with the appearance of a group of men arranged at formal dinner table lorded over by a wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano. There are several elements to be noted:

- 1) these are adult males in evening dress: businessmen, educated and prosperous, who find themselves at a gastronomic feast during a business meeting;
- 2) the iconography hints at tradition, reproducing the classic image of weddings at that time;
- 3) the wheel of Parmigiano holds the place of the most important guest at the head of the table and the product is given an “authority” never associated with it hitherto.
- 4) a precise consumer audience is targeted: upwardly mobile professionals, totally insensitive to the product’s price factor.

5.4 Treasure and Pirates: the Nineteen-Sixties from Poster Design to “Carosello”

The year 1971 saw the first advertising campaign which unequivocally leveraged the “virtue” of the *terroir* to promote the product. It is a relevant break with the previous forms of communication, due to a set of complementary reasons. First, there is a need to bear out the cheese’s “reputation” on expanding markets, becoming more and more distant from the production’s region both in geographical and cultural terms, by closely linking Parmigiano-Reggiano’s to its area of origin.⁴⁷ A second factor that has likely directed marketing strategies is the Italian political agenda of that period: in 1970, the administrative subdivision of the country into Regions, ruled by the 1948 constitution but never in force, is finally enforced. The whole issue was widely debated in the public arena in the previous decade covering not only the political side of the problem, but also encompassing features such as the distinctive physical-geographical traits of the various regions of the country, whose eno-gastronomical differences played a major role.⁴⁸ In connection with this latter aspect, two more interrelated elements probably had an additional influence. On the one hand, during the 1960s the French *AOC* model was finally applied to Italian wines, through the *Denominazione d’Origine Controllata* (“Protected Denomination of Origin”) system. On the other, these decades witness a growing interest for “regional cuisine” that is united to

⁴⁷ While the demand of typical products follows standard patterns of consumption, a particular trait of this kind of goods is strong regional market concentration. The perception of the intrinsic value of these products tends thus to decrease as the distance between areas of production and final markets increases; Gervasio ANTONELLI, *Volumi di offerta e marketing. Il caso dei prodotti agro-alimentari tipici*, in “Economia agro-alimentare”, 2000, no. 2, p. 56.

⁴⁸ Enzo Santarelli, *L’ente regione. L’idea regionalistica nei suoi termini storici, politici e costituzionali* (Roma, 1960). On the role that administrative subdivisions play in creating a framework favourable to the rise of food typicality, see Julia CSERGO, “L’emergere delle cucine ...”, pp. 649-651.



Fig. 19. Newspaper advertisement [Italy, 1971, by Consortium Parmigiano-Reggiano]. Planche 14.

the significant increase of domestic tourism boosted by mass motorisation: a fast and developing demand that marketing experts certainly did not ignore.⁴⁹

The communicative blueprint is simple but sophisticated at the same time (Fig. 19): the wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano, already sliced to show the cristal-line texture of the cheese's paste, lies on parchment which reproduces a map of the product's place of origin, comprising the provinces of Parma, Reggio Emilia and Modena, plus a part of those of Mantova and Bologna.

These few elements enable to strengthen the advert's communicative power by transmitting the product's sense of “tradition” and “lengthy history” to the consumer. Is not simply a matter of promoting a cheese, but rather of celebrating a unique product in which the very best virtues of a wealthy and prosperous *terroir* are embedded.

⁴⁹ The first *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata* (DOC) was decreed in 1963 in favour of Marsala, shortly followed by several other wines (like Chianti) which had a long-standing connection with a specific area of production. Among the most prominent opinion-makers who guided the rediscovery of regional cuisine in Italy was the gastronomist, oenologist and writer Luigi Veronelli; in 1966 he co-authored the first systematic book on this topic; see Luigi CARNACINA, Luigi VERONELLI, *La cucina rustica regionale*, 4 vols. (Milano, 1966). For the interplay between gastronomy and tourism, see Julia CSERGO, “L'emergere delle cucine ...”, pp. 652-654.

The sentence in the headline ("*Treasure Island: Parmigiano-Reggiano's place of origin*") can only be understood if compared to the image underneath:

- 1) note first and foremost the map: it is a roll of parchment on which the production area of Parmigiano-Reggiano is drawn (with the strokes and colours of ancient cadastral maps). The effect has a definite emotional impact: The Treasure Island – clearly read between the lines – is not a component of the advertising message, but represents an objective, incontrovertible historical fact, deeply anchored in the memory;
- 2) the contrast created by the muted, slightly uneven colour of the parchment and the equally uneven crystalline texture of the Parmigiano represents an evocative element of association intended to be kindled in the consumer's unconscious in the form of a *chromatic assonance*. The triangulation is simple. The map bears witness to the product's roots in a given *terroir* which has a "long history" behind it, made up of symbols and traditions, confirmed by the ancient parchment the Parmigiano is lying on. The product, destined to gratify the consumer's taste, is seen to have the same colours – and indeed seems to be made of the same material – as the parchment. Or to be more exact, in a mimetic process, it is the parchment that seems to be made of Parmigiano. At the end of this mental process, the circle closes and the goal of selling history as a "procreator of typicality" has been fulfilled. From this point of view, it is history (and its use) that builds on "tradition" rather than the product itself.⁵⁰

From 1969 to 1972 the Parmigiano/Treasure analogy was to appear in some commercials of "Carosello", the Italian state television's main advertising "container". A series of cartoons, "Briganti Mattacchioni" – (lit.) "*The Jolly Highwaymen*" – shows four improbable highwaymen, characters from an Italian literary tradition in search of treasure.⁵¹ The characters use a variety of methods to reach their goal from infiltrating a soldiers' camp to steal their wages, to trying to open the gates of a castle, or even trying to burgle an Egyptian pyramid and to force open the secret treasure vault. However, the four jolly highwaymen are the classic antiheroes of these cartoons and like the more famous Willy the Coyote, they inevitably end up victims of their own escapades. Flattened, battered or knocked about by unexpected explosions, the four jolly fellows quickly take to their heels, leaving room for the tail end of the commercial which extols the real virtues of the Po Plain's "Treasure Island" where Parmigiano-Reggiano was embedded in for many centuries – the only real treasure worth knocking oneself out for.

⁵⁰ Our methodological reference is to Eric J. HOBBSBAWM, Terence RANGER (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Hobsbawm's approach is applied to typical food in S. Magagnoli, *L'invenzione "industriale" della tradizione...*, in which the "invention" of Modena's balsamic vinegar is analysed.

⁵¹ For an analysis of this series, see Marco GIUSTI, *Il grande libro di Carosello...*, p. 170.

The series was very effective, thanks above all to the beauty of the music, the originality of the adventures and the overall brilliance of the communicative idea. The general narrative standard is powerful and explicit, appealing as it does to the ideals of history and tradition of the consumer. Still maintaining the irony, however, this advertising tool manages to convey those messages of tradition which are rooted in the product through the characters’ misadventures and jocularity without resorting to rhetoric or debasement.

6. Conclusions

In the 2nd century a.c., goods arriving to Rome from all corners of its boundless Empire were indeed marked by their intrinsic properties but, above all, by qualities related to their place of origin.⁵² In Renaissance Florence, like in 16th century Venice, it was possible to find oriental fabrics or precious artefacts coming from every part of the Mediterranean, as well as rare wines from Spain and Sicily or cheeses from Parma and Lodi.⁵³ Likewise, a number of food products arriving from more or less distant regions were in 19th century London housewives’ hands, determining thus a natural link between foods and their geographical origin. Only with market integration and the increase in food consumption, in particular among the upper-classes, typicality seems to become a relevant distinctive feature.

Karl Marx himself explains the difference between absolute and monopoly rent, adopting the example of superior quality wines.⁵⁴ Marx obviously could not take into account that monopoly rent can be “artificially” determined by laws such as those that legally protect place-based food and wine following the French *AOC* system., Parmigiano-Reggiano’s case makes no exception since, as it has been shown, its place of origin underwent a process of historical construction (or re-construction) whose contours are blurred if not questionable.

Terroir, here is the protagonist of this study; a protagonist that sometimes is karstic, sometimes clearly visible. Though geographical and historical references to the place of origin are explicitly used as promotional marketing tools only in the 1970s (the *Treasure Island*), the various sources that have been analysed (literary, historical or iconographic) all tend to emphasise, if not to mythicise, the image of the area in which Parmigiano-Reggiano is produced. Even if “*terroir et typicité ne sont pas réductibles l’un à l’autre, la typicité peut avoir d’autre fondement que le terroir*”, as Madeleine Ferrières argues, the bond between typicality and *terroir* is clearly the simplest to distinguish and

⁵² Jérôme CARCOPINO, *La vita quotidiana a Roma all’apogeo dell’Impero* (Roma, 1993), pp. 269-270.

⁵³ See for instance Paolo MALANIMA, *La decadenza di un’economia cittadina* (Bologna, 1982).

⁵⁴ Karl MARX, *The Capital*, vol. III (Chicago, 1909), p. 900.

thus to define.⁵⁵ This process of definition appears to be in the Parmigiano-Reggiano's case, in which the close tie product-*terroir* is nowadays an unavoidable marketing feature, a process historically feeble, if not artificial. For instance, the area in which Parmigiano-Reggiano is currently produced was, until the end of the 18th century, divided in five distinct political entities and, up to 1860, was shared out among three different states.

Parmigiano-Reggiano's typicality was (and is) however almost taken for granted and, as discussed in the introduction, this distinctive feature fostered the product's reputation since the end of the Middle Ages. The physical borders of its typicality, beyond which Parmigiano-Reggiano becomes today a different cheese (i.e. Grana-Padano), have nevertheless changed over centuries and only shortly before World War II were the boundaries of the current area of origin established. If one acknowledges that a place and its history are able to convey emotions and to influence the consumer's preferences, the successful story of place-based foods can be partially restated. The reason why it is right at the beginning of the *Retailing Revolution* that typicality starts to be manipulated, expanded and reduced, even transfigured, becomes more clear. In addition, 20th century developments of place-based food legal protection systems can be better explained, typicality having become a plastic material whose shape is in part the outcome of "a narration of memory".⁵⁶ Among place-based foods Parmigiano-Reggiano perhaps embodies a borderline case. Its typicality proved to be so effective in transmitting emotions to the consumers that it has been (and still is) used on an international scale as a synonym of quality, opening the way for a multitude of unlikely imitations: from the notorious Wisconsin *parmesan*, to the unique *parmesanito* cheese spread that can be found in Argentina. At a closer look, these products do not even try to copy the original, unless for the evocative force of its name on which they undoubtedly lever.

If this assumption is correct, in the case of Parmigiano-Reggiano the connection with the *terroir* becomes almost an "incidental" feature. An overturning in the narration of memory seems almost to occur: typical food is no longer the outcome of the place from where it comes, but rather the place it comes from is shaped and distinguished from its typicality. This reversal, if one considers the examples that have been provided, will be fully completed only with the rise of the mass media society. A reversal that will be fully completed, linking inextricably the quality of a product with its place of origin and its history, and building a coherent representation in which myth and reality are (con)fused together.

⁵⁵ Madeleine FERRIÈRES, *Terroir: jalons pour l'histoire d'un mot*, paper presented at the conference *La tipicità nella storia. Tradizione, innovazione e territorio* (Parma/Langhirano, 9-11 September 2010). Proceedings forthcoming.

⁵⁶ Maura FRANCHI, *Il cibo flessibile ...*, pp. 145-147.